

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



May 2014

Vol. 119, No. 5

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THE ROAD TO WISDOM

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON

Injuring Others

To injure another creates bondage and hides the truth. Negative virtues are not enough; we have to conquer Maya, and then she will follow us. We only deserve things when they cease to bind us. When the bondage ceases, really and truly, all things come to us. Only those who want nothing are masters of nature.

Take refuge in some soul who has already broken his bondage, and in time he will free you through his mercy. Higher still is to take refuge in the Lord (Ishvara), but it is the most difficult; only once in a century can one be found who has really done it. Feel nothing, know nothing, do nothing, have nothing, give up all to God, and say utterly, 'Thy will be done'. We only dream this bondage. Wake up and let it go. Take refuge in God, only so can we cross the desert of Maya. 'Let go thy hold, Sannyasin bold, say, Om tat sat, Om!'

It is our privilege to be allowed to be charitable, for only so can we grow. The poor man suffers that we may be helped; let the giver kneel down and give thanks, let the receiver stand up and permit. See the Lord back of every being and give to Him. When we cease to see evil, the world must end for us, since to rid us of that mistake is its only object. To think there is any imperfection creates it. Thoughts of strength



and perfection alone can cure it. Do what good you can, some evil will inhere in it; but do all without regard to personal result, give up all results to the Lord, then neither good nor evil will affect you.

Doing work is not religion, but work done rightly leads to freedom. In reality all pity is darkness, because whom to pity? Can you pity God? And is there anything else? Thank God for giving you this world as a moral gymnasium to help your development, but never imagine you can help the world. Be grateful to him who curses you, for he gives you a mirror to show what cursing is, also a chance to practise self-restraint; so bless him and be glad. Without exercise, power cannot come out; without the mirror, we cannot see ourselves.

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Contents

Traditional Wisdom	315
This Month	316
<i>Editorial: Maya at Its Best</i>	317
Mahasamadhi of Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj	319
Women Seer-saints of India and Their Songs <i>Dr Subhadra Desai</i>	323
The Isha Upanishad in Gandhi's Ahimsa <i>Joseph Nicholas</i>	329
Sri Vidya Mantra: Unravelling the Cosmos <i>Niraj Kumar</i>	332
The Struggle for Bhakti <i>Ajoy Kumar Bhattacharjee</i>	339
Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash <i>Swami Damodarananda</i>	342
The Many-splendoured Vivekananda's Vedanta <i>Dr M Sivaramkrishna</i>	347
Eternal Words <i>Swami Adbhutananda</i>	352
Reviews	357
Reports	360

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The Light of the Modern World —Swami Bhajananda



According to Swami Vivekananda, 'With the birth of Sri Ramakrishna the Golden Age has begun.' But today, for the generality of people, such an assertion may appear preposterous, with no sign of such a beginning visible anywhere. Who was Sri Ramakrishna? What was the purpose of his advent? Did he bring about a silent revolution, unseen on the surface?

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Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

The Journey

May 2014
Vol. 119, No. 5

त्रिरुन्नतं स्थाप्य समं शरीरं हृदीन्द्रियाणि मनसा सन्निवेश्य ।
ब्रह्मोडुपेन प्रतरेत विद्वान् स्रोतांसि सर्वाणि भयावहानि ॥

Keeping steady the body that has its three parts erect, and withdrawing the (sense) organs into the heart with the help of the mind, the enlightened person should cross over all the terrible currents by means of the float that Brahman is.

(Shvetashvatara Upanishad, 2.8)

विज्ञानसारथिर्यस्तु मनः प्रग्रहवान्नरः ।
सोऽध्वनः पारमाप्नोति तद्विष्णोः परमं पदम् ॥

The man, however, who has as his charioteer a discerning intellect, and who has under control the reins of the mind, attains the end of the road; and that is the highest place of Vishnu.

(Katha Upanishad, 1.3.9)

हरिः हरन्तमुयन्ति देवा विश्वस्येशानं वृषभं मतीनाम् ।
ब्रह्मसरूपमनुमेदमागादयनं मा विवधीर्विक्रमस्व ॥

Like servants, the gods follow Hari who is the Lord of the Universe, who leads all thoughts as the foremost leader, and who absorbs into himself the universe at the time of dissolution (or who destroys the sins of devotees). May this path to liberation taught in the Vedas having the same form as Brahman open itself to me. Deprive not me of that. Strive to secure it for me.

(Mahanarayana Upanishad, 49.1)

THIS MONTH

Maya at Its Best helps us understand the world's real nature in the present age by destroying our queer ideas about maya.

Mahasamadhi of Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Mission.



Dr Subhadra Desai of Delhi shows how **Women Seer-saints of India and Their Songs** have influenced and enriched Indian culture. The author, besides being a Sanskrit scholar, is an accomplished Hindustani classical vocalist and a recipient of many awards.

Mahatma Gandhi drew inspiration from many world's scriptures. Joseph Nicholas, engaged in research studies on Vedanta philosophy at the Kerala University, writes on **The Isha Upanishad in Gandhi's Ahimsa**.



The philosophical doctrine of the Sri Vidya links the individual with the cosmos at different levels. In **Sri Vidya Mantra: Unravelling the Cosmos** Niraj Kumar, president of the Society of Asian Consciousness, New Delhi, speaks of its mysterious power and relevance.

Bhakti is an easy and powerful path to God. Ajoy Kumar Bhattacharjee, a retired engineer from West Bengal, inspects **The Struggle for Bhakti**.

In the recapitulation of his **Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash**, Swami Damodarananda describes the spiritual experience he obtained by the grace of Shiva. The venerable senior swami now lives a retired life at Ramakrishna Math, Ulsoor, Bengaluru.



In the last part of **The Many-splendoured Vivekananda's Vedanta** Dr M Sivaramkrishna, former Head at the Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad, considers that Vivekananda's Vedanta belongs to all nations.

In the eighteenth part of **Eternal Words** Swami Adbhutananda declares that in order to become perfect God's grace is as necessary as the sadhaka's self-effort. The swami's words are translated from *Sat Katha*, published from Udbodhan Office, Kolkata.



EDITORIAL

Maya at Its Best

IT IS ASTOUNDING to learn how much humankind has achieved in the last few decades, and this momentum shows no signs of slowing down. This age, with its novelty and progress, has completely upset archaic predictions, redefined many parameters, confused most pundits, erased old moralities, broken many records, upended old institutions, remoulded individuals and societies, destroyed environments, legislated discord, made corruption and selfishness acceptable, and even made sanity insanity and vice versa. This list can go on, depending on what and who you are. The world that is going forwards turns around suddenly into a seemingly retrograde movement. We are all familiar with the feelings of hope and helplessness of what we see around. Just as the progress of humanity is multidimensional and cannot be enumerated here, so also one cannot enumerate all the problems during the retrograde movement. This is maya at its best.

The human mind is a mass of contradiction, and so are the body and the world outside. Nobody has yet understood much about them, and yet we are able to manipulate a few of these things for present and future human needs. The laws of karma are not just the straightforward cause-effect or action-reaction operations. There are unseen, individual and collective, dynamics that play a role in even a simple action. No one can predict what a particular result will be. Then there are those who wanting to live have to die, and those who wanting to die have to live. The elderly want to be and appear young; the


young have habits and attitudes of the elderly. Many women behave and work like men; men are increasingly becoming like women. Taboos are openly professed, knowledge shows ignorance, and virtue appears as vice. An honest person wants to do all that is right and is tricked into doing wrong. An evil person sometimes catches himself or herself doing good. Those who criticize others' faults find themselves doing those very things they abhor. When things are going right, there is invariably an undercurrent of something going wrong. We now know that everything, sacred or secular, has its bad and dark side, including the individuals, societies, cities, civilizations, religions, politics, and so on. Lying and falsehood are now passed as truth or half-truths; truth is stated to be mere facts that can be interpreted in multiple ways. There is no rest, real happiness, or peace in maya, yet people keep looking for them. Love, the highest sentiment of all life, is turning elusive, cheap, and corrupt. Everything contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. This is maya at its best.

Swami Vivekananda says: 'These tremendous contradictions in our intellect, in our knowledge, yea, in all the facts of our life face us on all sides.' Maya is the original contradiction: it is she who not just makes the possible impossible and vice versa, but makes all the contradictions exist besides the real things. For ages we had been sweeping the dark side under the carpet. We spoke of the world as beautiful and sublime through poetry and metaphors; we hid unpalatable truths from children while presenting them

with something else; we spun nice moral stories to lull people into a false sense of optimism and comfort. We hoped no one would notice the fights, wars, pillaging, and destruction down the ages. And to those who did, we embellished these gruesome events with explanations of heroism, nationalism, racial theories, religious rights, and so on. We did not show the face of humanity wearing godlike masks that hide cruel natures. We did not show the pain, sorrow, anguish, desperation, and futility of a life of struggles that ends with nothing worthwhile. In this age we cannot, fortunately, hide such things anymore. Now is the time for the truth to come out in bold relief. Swamiji says: 'We cannot hide a carrion with roses; it is impossible. It would not avail long; for soon the roses would fade, and the carrion would be worse than ever before. So with our lives. We may try to cover our old and festering sores with cloths of gold, but there comes a day when the cloth of gold is removed, and the sore in all its ugliness is revealed.' This is maya at its best.

What, why, or who is this maya? Conventionally, it has been designated in the feminine gender, spoken of as *mahamaya*, and worshipped as the Divine Mother. Maya is also described as 'a great wonder and indescribable'. Old Vedantins would call maya as 'that which does not exist', unreal, magical, dreamlike, and illusory. Whatever the designations and descriptions, this is where all contradictions—internal, external, material, spiritual, individual, and social—meet. The next thing to understand is that just as a silkworm is bound in its cocoon and finally breaks free, so maya is the cocoon for the jiva. In it the jiva, like the silkworm, slowly develops the maturity, knowledge, and strength to become free. And just like a cocoon is absolutely necessary for the development of the silkworm, so is maya necessary for our

development and ultimate freedom. For a long time we have shied away from facing it, and the result was bondage of all kinds. Ultimately we shall find that maya was all through working to free us by breaking our ideas of ourselves and the world. The most important thing to understand is that maya is the power of God—it is one with God. Bhagavan says in the Bhagavad-gita: 'Since this divine maya of mine, made up of the *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—is difficult to cross over, those who take refuge in me alone cross over this maya.'

That this power of God is more manifested in this age, implies that God itself is more manifested in this age. This power of God—God—has manifested as an avatara in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. Tota Puri, Sri Ramakrishna's Advaita guru, achieved a first-hand experience of this divine maya and exclaimed in wonder: '*Kya daivi maya*; what divine maya'. He saw the Divine Mother pervading and controlling everything. Nothing or no one, including a knower of Brahman, can do anything without her bidding. Tota Puri then understood that Sri Ramakrishna held the key to everything and prayed to let him leave. It is very difficult to cross unaided the ocean of maya, and that is why an avatara comes to lead us back to God. For only the exceptional few can say like Swamiji: 'Black and thick are the folds of sinister fate. But I am the master. I raise my hand, and lo, they vanish! All this is nonsense. And fear? I am the Fear of fear, the Terror of terror, I am the fearless secondless One, I am the Rule of destiny, the Wiper-out of fact. *Shri wah Guru!*' Most of us need help to break free, and God 'who though birthless, undecaying by nature, and the Lord of beings', takes an adorable form to lead us back to our real infinite nature, beyond all the terrible workings and effects of the ultimately unreal maya. 



MAHASAMADHI OF
Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj

WITH DEEP SORROW we announce the passing away of Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, vice president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, on 14 March 2014 at about 9.10 a.m. He was ninety.



Revered Maharaj had been suffering from various old-age ailments for the past few years. On 8 February he was admitted to the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, Kolkata, with fever and chest infection, which was diagnosed as pneumonia. He was kept in the intensive care unit under expert medical care. On 16 February his condition became critical and, despite the best medical treatment, his life could not be saved.

Swami Gitanandaji was born on 17 April 1924 at Arial village, Tangipara, in the Vikrampur Parganas, District Dacca, in what is now Bangladesh. His pre-monastic name was Vasudev Mukhopadhyaya. He was born in a pious Vaishnava family that daily worshiped the *shalagrama*, symbol of Vishnu. His father Sri Gourmohan Mukhopadhyaya and mother Sarajubala Devi had two sons and three daughters; Vasudev was the third child. The religious temperament at home shaped Vasudev's inner life. His father being an employee of the Indian Railways had to travel to various places on duty; therefore, Vasudev's childhood was spent partly in Parvatipur, Bangladesh, and partly at Amingao, near Guwahati. Later he returned to Parvatipur and completed his matriculation.

Although calm and quiet by nature Vasudev was a daring boy. Once at Guwahati he swam

across the turbulent Brahmaputra. Later, as a monk, he would swim across the Ganga at Belur Math from one bank to the other. A keen introspective mind lay beyond this daring. He was deeply influenced by the discussions on the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavata at home. Imbued with a spiritual longing from an early age, Vasudev determined that he would not lead a worldly life.

He commenced studies in mathematics, physics, and chemistry at the Scottish Church College in 1943 in Calcutta—mathematics had a special attraction for him. In 1945 he passed the BSc with distinction and enrolled for MSc at the Calcutta University. During this time he came across the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. Vasudev found a new meaning to life in the message of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. The seeds of spirituality sown in his childhood now sprouted into a deep aspiration.

While in Calcutta his family learnt that Vasudev had suddenly left without telling anyone. After about a year they learnt that he had joined the Ramakrishna Math at Madras as a brahmachari on 17 May 1946. Revered Swami Kailashanandaji was then the *adhyaksha*, head, under whose care and loving ministration Vasudev started his monastic life. He received mantra *diksha*, spiritual initiation, from Revered Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, sixth president of the Order, at the Visakhapatnam centre in 1947. Brahmachari Vasudev received brahmacharya vows in 1952 and was given the name Brahmachari Ameyachaitanya.

Vasudev also served Revered Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj for a brief period. He was ordained a monk and given the name Swami Gitananda in 1956 by Revered Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj, the seventh president. During this period he served as the cashier at the headquarters and also as secretary to Revered Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj.

From 1956 to 1961 he served as assistant at Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Varanasi. Swami Gitanandaji was engaged in the work of organizing the Centenary Celebrations of Swami Vivekananda in Calcutta, 1961–5. In 1965 Gitanandaji was sent to the Kanpur centre. In 1969 he was again sent to Varanasi and later that year became assistant secretary of Ranchi Sanatorium, where he later served as its head till 1972. He drew unto himself common people of the locality as well as the educated and respected, thus connecting everyone to the centre and its welfare activities. In March 1973 he was given charge of the Varanasi Sevashrama, where he held that post till 1974. In December 1973 he was elected trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission. In June 1974 Maharaj was appointed one of the assistant secretaries of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math. In April 1975 he was appointed treasurer of the Order. He again became assistant secretary from 1 April 1985. He was released from the responsibilities of being the assistant secretary on 1 April 1995 and continued to stay in Belur Math.

On 1 April 2003 he was elected vice president of the Ramakrishna Order, to which he initially did not agree, but at the repeated requests of senior monks he finally yielded. He remained vice president till the end of his mortal life. Though at first he stayed at the Baghbazar Math, known as Mayer-bari, he later accepted the post of *adhyaksha* of the Ramakrishna Math, Yogodyan, Kankurgachhi, which lasted till 30 August 2009.

As vice president of the Order he travelled widely all over India. He initiated more than 45,000 spiritual aspirants. He also visited Russia and Mauritius. He was immensely attracted to all places of pilgrimage, though he had a special love for Varanasi and Vrindaban. Jayrambati was another place of pilgrimage very dear to him.

The way he did pranams to the Holy Mother left an indelible mark in the minds of those who witnessed it.

His discussions on the Bhagavata at Belur Math was filled with divine fervour and went far beyond the dry interpretations given by learned pandits. The fruit of these lecture series took the shape of an extraordinary book in Bengali: *Bhagavat Katha*. He also worked tirelessly to give shape to another book: *Sri Ramer Anudhyan*. Another favourite topic of study for Maharaj was the life of Sri Chaitanya.

Swami Gitanandaji functioned as the acharya for brahmacharya and sannyasa ceremonies every year from 1988 to 2008. His sixty-five years of monastic life illustrated the ideals of the Ramakrishna Order. His habit of working with serenity while immersed in japa was a guiding



example to everyone. Maharaj liked to work without assistance and never gave any indication about his personal needs. He was very punctual and utilized every minute of his day.


He woke up very early and after bathing would attend *mangalarati*. As long as he was in good health, attending morning and evening *arati* was part of his daily routine. Thereafter he would sit for *japa*. After finishing his breakfast, he would again get immersed in *japa*. He would then commence his studies and reply to letters from devotees. He greeted questions from devotees smilingly and gave brief answers. After noon prasada, when all had left, Maharaj would take a stroll around the ashrama with the *japa-mala*, rosary, in hand. Be it at Belur Math or Yogodyan he was commonly seen walking about in his room repeating the mantra. Owing to constant repetition the *rudraksha* beads of his rosary had become smooth. In spite of his absorption in *japa*, Swami Gitanandaji was alert about the needs of the people around him.

During his early days, when he was working at the headquarters, he would daily play volleyball along with a few other monks. Revered Maharaj was simple and affectionate towards all monks and brahmacharis.

Once a devotee asked Maharaj: 'How many times should I repeat the name of God?' Maharaj replied emphatically: 'It is not sufficient if you repeat only 108 times. Now your samskaras are strong. Times have also changed a lot; try at least to repeat 1,008 times. If you get time repeat the mantra 10,000 times.'

When Revered Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj entered *mahasamadhi*, he left behind memories of a divine life for the benefit of aspirants and devotees. Monks, brahmacharis, devotees, and followers came to have a last darshan at Kankurgachhi. In the evening of 14 March it was brought to Belur Math and kept at the Cultural Centre.

The next day the body was brought to the Math courtyard at 10 a.m. by monks and brahmacharis and at noon was taken to all the temples. At the Holy Mother's ghat the final rites prior to cremation were performed. His mortal frame was taken to the residence of Srmat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, the president of the Order, who placed a garland around the neck. The body was then brought to the samadhi ghat and consigned to the flames. Belur Math, the venue of Maharaj's sadhana, was hushed and the flames engulfed his mortal body and blazed upwards.

Revered Gitanandaji was unostentatious. Keeping himself in the background, he placed before humanity the ideal lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda. His whole life was a total consecration to their sangha. To him all works were worship. Whoever approached him received direction, guidance, and inspiration. Wherever he went there was a sweet atmosphere of peace. Once a group of sadhus asked Maharaj about the method to be successful in the life of sadhana; Maharaj replied: 'You only need one thing—God's name. Keep it with you always. You may not see him, but you can be close to him (through his name). There are many other things in the books that may help some people, but I don't know about these things. I just know God's name.' This answer indeed summed up Revered Gitanandaji Maharaj's remarkable life. 



Women Seer-saints of India and Their Songs

Dr Subhadra Desai

IN INDIA, AS ELSEWHERE in the world, music and literature have often converged since the earliest times. In hymns, songs, and intonations India has inherited, through millennia, a remarkable legacy in which exceptional literature finds an inspiring voice. And this tradition of the synthesis of literature and music that germinated in the Vedic Age has remained alive and vibrant since then.

Seer-saint-poets of India such as Kabir, Surdas, Tulasidas, Mirabai, Gorakhnath, and others adopted music as a medium to express their devotion as well as their realization of Truth. In this tradition of saint-composers there was a considerable presence of women who were spiritual seekers, saint poetesses, ascetics, mendicants, and devotees. They recorded their spiritual experiences and realizations in the form of songs, which not only bear the distinctive impression of their personal journeys but also illustrate the social and cultural milieu of their times, their achievements and failures. They were often not only seers but spirited women who dared to question parochial social structures of their times and faced innumerable personal hardships and challenges. Their single-minded devotion and intense love for God transformed them into spiritual heroines of their times.

God's Brides

Spread across a vast expanse of space and time, these women are unified in their unique language of love, truth, honesty, strength, and empowerment. This spirit has lived on for centuries through oral singing traditions in their

respective regions. These women belonged to different regions in India and sang in their own mother tongues: Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Kashmiri, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi, and others. Most of them were well known in their own regions during their lifetime. Some of the lyrical forms, composed by these women saints, date back to more than a thousand years, while some are a few centuries old. The songs portray the divine love of the women seers as well as a myriad of metaphors encapsulating their feelings regarding life. Some songs even articulate spiritual wisdom of a high order, which are by no means inferior to the compositions of other saints in terms of substance or feeling.

The songs of these women seers are sung even in the present times by musicians and lay people. The nameless bearers of these traditions—men and women of different castes and classes, though mostly of lower castes—have played a vital role in preserving these songs, thereby championing their authors. A feature that characterises these songs, whether by better or lesser or unknown authors, is the popularity they continue to enjoy among the common unsophisticated people of the villages. The songs thus appear to be, for the common folk, a well-suited opportunity for a cultural activity of a higher order. For instance, songs of women saints of Rajasthan and Gujarat are largely sung by people belonging to lower castes, even in present times—they can easily relate to these songs. A handful of songs of women saints of Assam, Odisha, and Manipur in the Vaishnava tradition, were collated from very elderly traditional teachers of Assamese culture

and then published in Odiya texts and Manipuri sankirtanas respectively. These women were well known during their lifetime, within their own regions, and—with the exception of Sija Laiiobi, the Manipuri princess-saint—they were acknowledged as the first poetesses of their areas. Unfortunately only a negligible amount of works belonging to them can be traced today.

A remarkable phenomenon that has emerged in the songs of Andal (ninth century, Tamil Nadu), Akka Mahadevi (twelfth century, Karnataka), Mirabai (sixteenth century, Rajasthan), Tarigonda Vengamamba (eighteenth century, Andhra), and Sija Laiiobi (eighteenth century, Manipur) is the immense yearning to be united with God as brides. These women are the best examples of bridal mysticism, where a mystic woman—or man—shuns all worldly bindings and considers herself married to the Divine. Andal was the first of the mystic brides among all women saints. In a different space and time, this aspect of devotion is exemplified by other women saints such as Akka Mahadevi, Mirabai, Vengamamba, Sija Laiiobi, and others.

These women were the earliest poetesses of India, whose feelings and experiences come to us through songs. These are oral traditions that have been preserved in the different genres of Indian music, such as Sama Vedic, folk, and Hindustani and Carnatic classical music.¹

Vedic Seer-poetesses

The first hymns ascribed to women seers of the Vedic period are sung as Sama Veda hymns in the earliest known musical tradition of India. This is evident in the chanting-singing traditions of Samagana prevalent today. The songs by seer-poetesses during the great bhakti movement of the mediaeval period, in the local vernaculars, are sung in the regional musical forms in their respective regions to this day.

Brihaddevata (2.82–4) and *Arshanukramani* (10.100–2), which are authoritative treatises on the Vedas, record twenty-seven women seers of the Rig Veda—the first and earliest literature in the world—who have hymns attributed to them. Little is known about them, and that mainly through traditional sources, but the inclusion of their hymns in the two above-mentioned treatises is significant for the present study, as these women are mentioned as *brahmavadinah*, women seers who attained the knowledge of Brahman, also called rishikas.

Reference to some of these rishikas is also found in the Sama Veda Samhita, the earliest literary document on Indian music, in which the system of chanting or singing the Sama Veda hymns in four, five, six, and even seven Vedic *svaras*, musical notes, was formalized for the first time in the history of Indian music.

Of the twenty-seven rishikas of the Rig Veda, Vak, Godha, Indramatri, and Sarparajni have hymns attributed to them in the Sama Veda Samhita. Scholars are divided in their opinion about these women being real or mythical characters, even though they are mentioned as women seers in two authoritative Vedic treatises.

The hymns ascribed to the women seers of the Vedic age were not only sung as Sama, along with Sama hymns of other male rishis, but were also documented in the notation system of the Sama tradition. These Sama hymns are still sung by *samagas*, experts in different living traditions, which is enormously significant in the history of Indian culture.

Bhakti Traditions

The mediaeval period in India produced many saints of the bhakti type, beginning with the Shaiva saints of the Tamil region in the sixth century. Sixty-three Nayanmars and twelve Alvars of the Tamil region were the earliest Shaiva

and Vaishnava saints respectively, whose lives and songs of love for God brought radical transformation in the religious life of India. For the first time God was not an entity to be feared or adored from a distance, but was now openly loved as a master, child, playmate, friend, lover, or father. The various traditions in which the women seers-saints flourished are the following:

(i) Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions in the Tamil region

(a) Shaiva tradition of Nayanmars

(b) Bhagavata tradition of Azhvars, or Alwars

(ii) Shaiva and Vaishnava traditions in Karnataka and Andhra regions

(a) Virashaiva or Lingayat movement

(b) Haridasa tradition

(c) Vaishnava tradition

(iii) Vaishnava and other *panths*, sects, from the Deccan or the region around Maharashtra

(a) Mahanubhava *panth*

(b) Varkari *panth*

(c) Ramdasi *panth*

(iv) Gujarat, Saurashtra region, and Rajasthan

(a) Vaishnava tradition

(b) Mahapanth or Nijara *panth*

(v) Shaiva tradition in Kashmir

(vi) Vaishnava traditions in eastern India, including Assam, Odisha, and Manipur.

Baul mendicants of Bengal of the past and present have had women sadhakas but no record exists of a woman Baul who expressed her feelings and experiences through her own songs. They are known to sing their guru's—Mahajan's—songs.

The iconic fifteenth-century saint-poetess Mirabai, whose life and music assumed the proportions of an enduring legend in India for their unique significance, is widely revered today as one of the best exemplars of all consuming devotion to a spiritual ideal and equal in stature

with India's greatest saints. She rejected societal norms with defiance, leaving her marital home to be united with her divine lover Sri Krishna. Her life and music blurred distinctions between worshipfulness and intense love. Today, after six centuries, celebrated and admired for her role in shaping both India's spiritual and cultural life, her songs are sung not only in the folk traditions of Rajasthan and Gujarat but also by classical musicians in both Hindustani and Carnatic genres.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar, literally 'the saintly mother of Karaikkal', of the seventh century, is one of the sixty-three great Nayanmar saints of Tamil Nadu. She is the first saint poetess of India. In one of her songs, Karaikkal Ammaiyar describes herself as a *pey*, ghost, who dances in the company of Shiva, in the cremation grounds of Tiruvalankadu:

'Earnest Brass Mirabai'

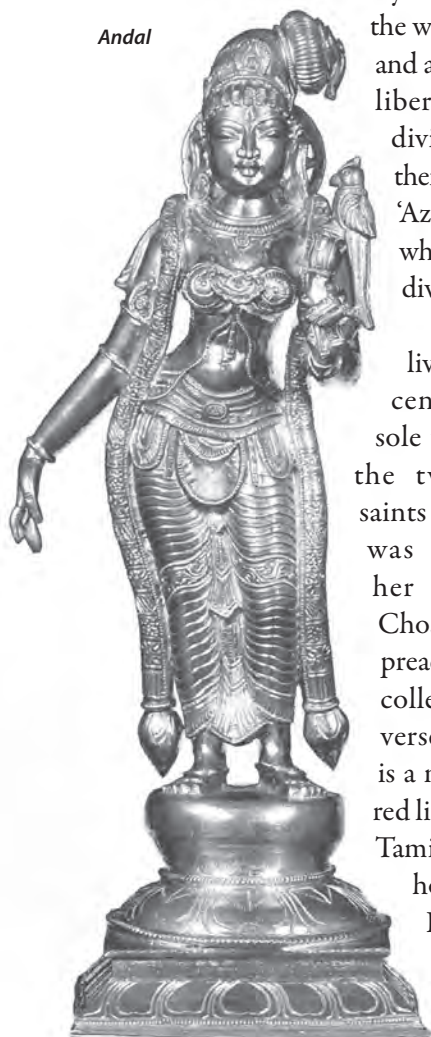


The female pey has
sagging breasts and bulging veins
hallowed eyes and bared teeth
ruddy down on her sunken belly
long canines
and lanky shins on knobby ankles;
she lingers, howling, at the cremation
ground.

Dancing here,
with effortless composure
as his matted locks radiate in all directions,
our father resides at Tiruvalankadu.²

The Azhvars lived between the sixth and the ninth centuries and were devotees of Vishnu.

Andal



They considered life in the world as transient and aimed to achieve liberation through divine union with their God. The term 'Azhvar' means 'one who is immersed in divine love'.

Andal, who lived in the ninth century, was the sole woman among the twelve Azhvar saints and, like Mira, was dedicated to her Ishta Devata, Chosen Deity, since preadolescence. Her collection of thirty verses, *Tiruppavai*, is a much loved sacred literature in most Tamil Hindu households to this day.

In her first song Andal sings of

her journey on a bright moon day in the month of Margazhi—December-January—to the abode of her beloved deity:

In the month of Margazhi,
on an auspicious bright moon day,
bejeweled girls who would join us for the
bath come along.
Graceful girls of Ayarpadi cowherd clan,
sweet little ones!
Narayana, the son of Nandagopa is known
for his sharp spear and fierce deeds:
He is the darling child, lion cub of
the beautiful-eyed Yashoda.
Our dark-hued, lotus-eyed, radiant, moon-
faced Lord alone will grant us our boons.
Girls come, assemble, and
win the world's praise.

The other celebrated work of Andal is *Nacchiyar Tirumoli*.

The Virashaiva or Lingayat movement and the Vaishnava-Haridasa tradition in Karnataka flourished from twelfth century onwards. The Virashaivas visualized a society free from discrimination based on caste, creed, and wealth. Their philosophy rejected the prevailing social, political, and religious systems. The adherents of this faith were also known as Lingayats, 'those who wear a *linga*—Shiva's emblem—on one's body'.

Among the thirty-four Virashaiva women *vachana-kartris*, composers of *vachana*,³ Akka Mahadevi was the most eminent and radical woman saint. She was a wandering mystic who shunned all worldly ties to embrace Shiva as her immortal husband. She lovingly addressed her deity as Chenna Mallikarjuna in her *vachanas*. She rejected the authority of the Vedas as well as prescribed discriminations based on caste, gender, and class. Her fearless expressions are in the form of *vachanas*, numbering more than a thousand, which contain spiritual wisdom of the highest order and are sung even today.

In a *vachana* Akka Mahadevi recounts for her friends her dream about Shiva, the bestower of blessings, who comes to her for *bhiksha*, alms.

In Maharashtra, Mahanubhava, the Varkari and Ramadasi *panths* grew during the period between the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries. The Varkari *panth*, a living tradition in present-day Maharashtra, was led by saints belonging to diverse backgrounds such as the heretic brahmanas, social outcastes, shudras, the untouchable Mahars, and even devadasis. Women leaders were common in this sect, and saints of this tradition such as Muktabai, Bahinabai, Janabai, Soyarabai, Nirmala, and Kanhopatra were reputed to be immersed in love for the Divine. Their songs, well known as *abhangs*, were addressed to their favourite deity Vitthala—Vishnu—of Pandharpur.

In an *abhang*, Janabai sings in praise of Pandharpur, the abode of her beloved deity Pandharinath, or Vitthala, where devotees congregate to sing and dance intoxicated in divine love. Janabai says: ‘One who sings God’s name from the heart is sure to find refuge in Him.’

The Shaiva rebel saint Lalleshwari, or Lalded, of the fourteenth century, is the most prominent woman saint-poetess of Kashmir. She composed in the vernacular language of the region, while the language for scholarly writings prevalent during her time was Sanskrit. The compositions of Lalded are known as *lalvakh*; they are full of imagery and exceptionally poetic in nature. A few selected *vakhs* of Lalleshwari are illustrated here:

With a rope of untwisted thread am I towing
a boat upon the ocean,
Where will my God hear?
Will He carry me over?
Like water in goblets of unbaked clay,
do I slowly waste away
My soul is in a dizzy whirl.
Fain would I reach my home?



Statue of Akka Mahadevi at her birthplace, Udathadi

In time past we were,
in time future we shall be,
Throughout the ages we have been,
Forever the sun rises and sets,
Forever Shiva creates,
dissolves and creates again.

* * *

He from whose navel steadfastly
proceedeth in its upward course
The syllable Om, and naught but it,
And for whom the *kumbhaka* exercise
formeth
A bridge to the *Brahma-randhra*,
He beareth in his mind the one and only
mystic spell (*manthar* or *mantra*),
And of what benefit to him are thousand spells?

* * *

Thou alone art the heavens,
and Thou alone art the earth.
Thou alone art the day, the air, the night.
Thou alone art the meal-offering, sandal paste,
the flowers, the water of aspersion.
Thou alone art all that is.
What, therefore, can I offer thee.⁴

The women saints from Gujarat and the Saurashtra region chiefly belonged to two religious traditions, namely Vaishnava and Mahapanth, or Nijara *panth*.

The spiritual precepts of the Mahapanth were designed for practice by man and woman together as husband and wife, or even otherwise. Close secrecy was maintained around these tenets, and only a practitioner had access to them. Practitioners came from all walks of life and often belonged to the lower strata of society. In several instances women became the guru or the initiator. References to women belonging to this *panth* such as Toral, Liralbai, Lidalbai, Amarbai, and others are traced back as early as the fourteenth century.


In one of her songs Liralbai, of the sixteenth century, sings:

O Ram,
Who created this body?
Why did you make it so (transient)?
The moon, sun, the multitude of stars,
Hammer and sickle, shapes and designs,
All reside within me.
Why did you then make it so (transient)?
Orchards, trees, wind, and water,
Dwelling spaces, gardens,
my tree-beds and fruits,
even the reaper,
all are within,
Why did you then, make it so (transient)?
Lock and key (of my existence) dwell in me,
the opener is also present,
Ganga, Yamuna, the holy pilgrimages,
are all within,
Why did you then, make it so (transient)?
O tell me, my Ram,
why did you make this body so transient?
Liralbai seeks to know the Truth, O Ram.

Known as the Mirabai of Andhra Pradesh in the eighteenth century, Tarigonda Vengamamba was an ardent devotee of Lord Venkateshvara.

Like Mirabai, she believed she was wedded to her divine Lover. In the course of her struggle against the oppressive social order of her time, she was drawn towards philosophy and yoga and became a great yogini and poetess of her time.

These eminent seer-saints as Mirabai, Andal, Akka Mahadevi, Lalded, and others paved the way for a remarkable number of women spiritual seekers, most of whom led ordinary lives but inspired by their love for God achieved exceptional heights in their spiritual lives. Most of them, though unlettered, were not deterred from singing to God in their simple vernacular languages. Their compositions were not written down for several centuries, but were carried forwards till the present through the age-old oral traditions of India.

The abiding influence of the songs of women seers, albeit uneven and scattered across communities in present-day India, is evidence of the deep impact they exercised in their own time. For the literary and musical value of the songs and their messages of transcendence, of sublime surrender, or even of assertion of women's autonomy, they constitute a priceless heritage to the whole world. 

Notes and References

1. Sama Vedic hymns ascribed to four women seers of the Vedic age, and songs and lives of about seventy-five women saint-poetesses of the mediaeval period, which are sung even today, have been traced by this author.
2. Translation by Karen Pechilis, *Interpreting Devotion* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 188—Tiruvalankadu is about sixty kilometres from Chennai (Madras).
3. *Vachanas* are prose texts in Kannada composed by Virashaiva saints that evolved in the twelfth century.
4. See George Grierson and Lionel Barnett, *Lalla-vakyani, or The Wise Sayings of Lal Ded* (London: Royal Society, 1920).

The Isha Upanishad in Gandhi's Ahimsa

Joseph Nicholas

MAHATMA GANDHI WAS much influenced by world scriptures such as the Bhagavadgita, the Bible, and the Koran, as well the literature of Swami Vivekananda, Leo Tolstoy, David Thoreau, and so on. However, the influence of the Gita, which says that a yogi can be a contemplative or a person of action, was profound on Gandhi. He dedicated his life for its ethical and social implementation. Like many contemporary Indian thinkers, Gandhi accepted the Vedantic understanding of God as Satchidananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Apart from the Gita, another scripture that inspired Mahatma Gandhi was the *Isha Upanishad*. He says of the first mantra: 'Even if all the Upanishads and all scriptures of Hinduism happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes and only this mantra were left intact in the memory of Hindus, then Hinduism would live for ever.'¹

Deriving Morality from the Upanishads

The first mantra of the *Isha Upanishad* says: 'Om. All this—whatsoever moves on the earth—should be covered by the Lord. Protect (your Self) through that detachment. Do not covet anybody's wealth.'² The concepts of this mantra strengthened in Gandhi the urge to realize the ultimate Reality through karma, bhakti, and jnana, which were applied in a practical way for social and moral action. Since he gave supreme importance to the ethical nature of ahimsa, non-violence, this mantra became Gandhi's method to root out injustice in society. Gandhian ahimsa was to forgive and forget, not to hurt and covet what belongs to others or one's enemy. Gandhi himself

confessed that he practised ahimsa, thus making him not a mere visionary but a practical idealist. He added that non-violence is meant not just for rishis and saints but also for the common people.

Ahimsa is a process of awakening the conscience of the oppressor to the fundamental goodness and truth that resides in oneself as well as in others. Gandhi says: 'Non-violence is a quality of the heart. Whether there is violence or non-violence in our actions can be judged only by reference to the spirit behind them. Everyone, therefore, who regards the observance of non-violence, as a moral duty should guide his actions by the principle stated above.'³ This kind of ahimsa is for the person who performs all actions as a service for the good of others, while dedicating the actions to God. Speaking about ahimsa Gandhi said: 'Work achieved through aggressive picketing will be of doubtful worth; work achieved through loving persuasive pressure will be lasting' (45.274). Therefore, in Gandhi's view ahimsa, which to him became a religion, is a potent force that must begin with one's mental attitude. In it there is no coercion. One has to be very careful about the mind and its ability to remember. Ahimsa gives one peace; violence brings one great distress and anguish. This is coherent with what is said in the *Isha Upanishad*: 'O Fire! O god! Knowing as thou do all our deeds, lead us by the good path for the enjoyment of the fruits of our deeds; remove from us all crooked sins. We offer thee many words of salutations.'⁴ He said that if India accepts violence to gain its independence, it will be unbearable and unacceptable. India has a mission in the world that has to be actualized by non-violence. 'My



'A Passage to India',
by Siddhartha Ghosh

life is dedicated to service of India through the religion of non-violence.⁵

Gandhi advised the freedom fighters and politicians that aggression could never bring about the desired results. Economic and political independence is the need of society, and that has to be achieved through the acceptance of peace and harmony with the enemy. He wanted to fight against *avidya*, ignorance, through *vidya*, knowledge. He insisted that all those who really thirsted for political or any kind of independence should have ahimsa as their norm (15).

Vedanta's Influence on Gandhi

The efforts of all spiritual as well as political and social thinkers is said to have been the removal of obstruction for the individual and society to grow. Gandhi, being a political and social reformer, derived his principles from practical Vedanta. Every sage or yogi generates actions from a deep sense of conviction. Such actions naturally bring in morality, goodness, austerity, unselfishness, and so on. This happens more powerfully with the Vedantic concept of oneness of all beings at a deeper level. Such a conviction and its practical actions become

part of the person's character, and this is what happened in the life of Gandhi, for whom ahimsa was embedded in spirituality and not in mere philosophy. If we evaluate Gandhi's actions it is evident that they were the outcome of his mental courage in the conviction of Vedantic teachings. The precepts of the *Isha Upanishad* stimulated his inner energy towards morality.

Vedanta initiated him not only to exercise ahimsa but also to preach it as a model for society. Gandhi advised his followers to use ahimsa in their daily public as well as private life. The courage of a non-violent individual is much nobler than the animal passion and violence that the world has been drenched in for ages. To remain calm under the greatest provocation, to resist one's foes and yet cherish no hatred or animosity towards them, to oppose brute force with soul-force—these are indeed actions of a higher nature than mere bloodshed and fighting. Gandhi demonstrated this great soul-force not only through his own life but also through thousands of his followers. He saw ahimsa as the basic law of our being that can be used as an effective principle for social action. A person who practises


ahimsa could be in consonance with truth, which expressed itself in the desire for peace, justice, order, freedom, and personal dignity.⁶

Gandhi reminds us that ahimsa is not a policy for the seizure of power, but it is a way of 'transforming relationships so as to bring about a peaceful transfer of power, affected freely and without compulsion by all concerned, because all have come to recognize it as right' (ibid.). Gandhi repeatedly says that the thirst for and power of ahimsa comes from God, and so it is a commandment. Even though a person may not be able to practise ahimsa perfectly, one has to make continuous efforts and sacrifices for it. Ahimsa is the force or power of God that realizes itself.⁷ Gandhi himself sheds light on this while speaking on its validity: 'An armed person naturally relies upon arms. A person who is unarmed relies upon the unseen power called God. That which is unseen is not necessarily non-existent. God is the force among all forces known and unknown. Non-violence without reliance upon that force is a poor stuff to be thrown in the dust' (76.232).

Gandhi welcomed the youths of the world to create a non-violent world order through ahimsa. Hence an individual who wishes to follow the Gandhian way of ahimsa should apply it as a norm in every appropriate circumstance. Gandhi himself applied ahimsa in every action of life—domestic, institutional, economic, and political. He concluded that there is no single case in which it failed. Moreover, while addressing an audience Gandhi reminded people that religion is based on ahimsa: 'It is love in its active form.'⁸ It is a love not only for our friends and neighbours but also for those who may be our enemies. He insisted Indians to accept ahimsa as their norm to serve society and the nation, disregarding enemy threats.

As humans we need to learn to live with others, hence ahimsa becomes important for the smooth running of society. Through this attitude

one is filled with empathy for others. The *Isha Upanishad* declares: 'He who perceives all beings in the Self itself, and the Self in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of that (realization).'⁹ In conclusion, Gandhi's acquaintance with this Upanishad stimulated him to adopt the method of ethical and social actions for the development of society. His philosophy of life is the one of a *satyagrahi*, one who holds on to Truth. The *Isha Upanishad* says: 'The face of Truth (Brahman) is concealed by a golden vessel. Do thou, O Sun, open it, so as to be seen by me who am by nature truthful (or am the performer of rightful actions)' (15). Gandhi also fought for the downtrodden; the *Isha Upanishad* further speaks about the dying person saying: 'O mind, remember—remember all that has been done' (17).

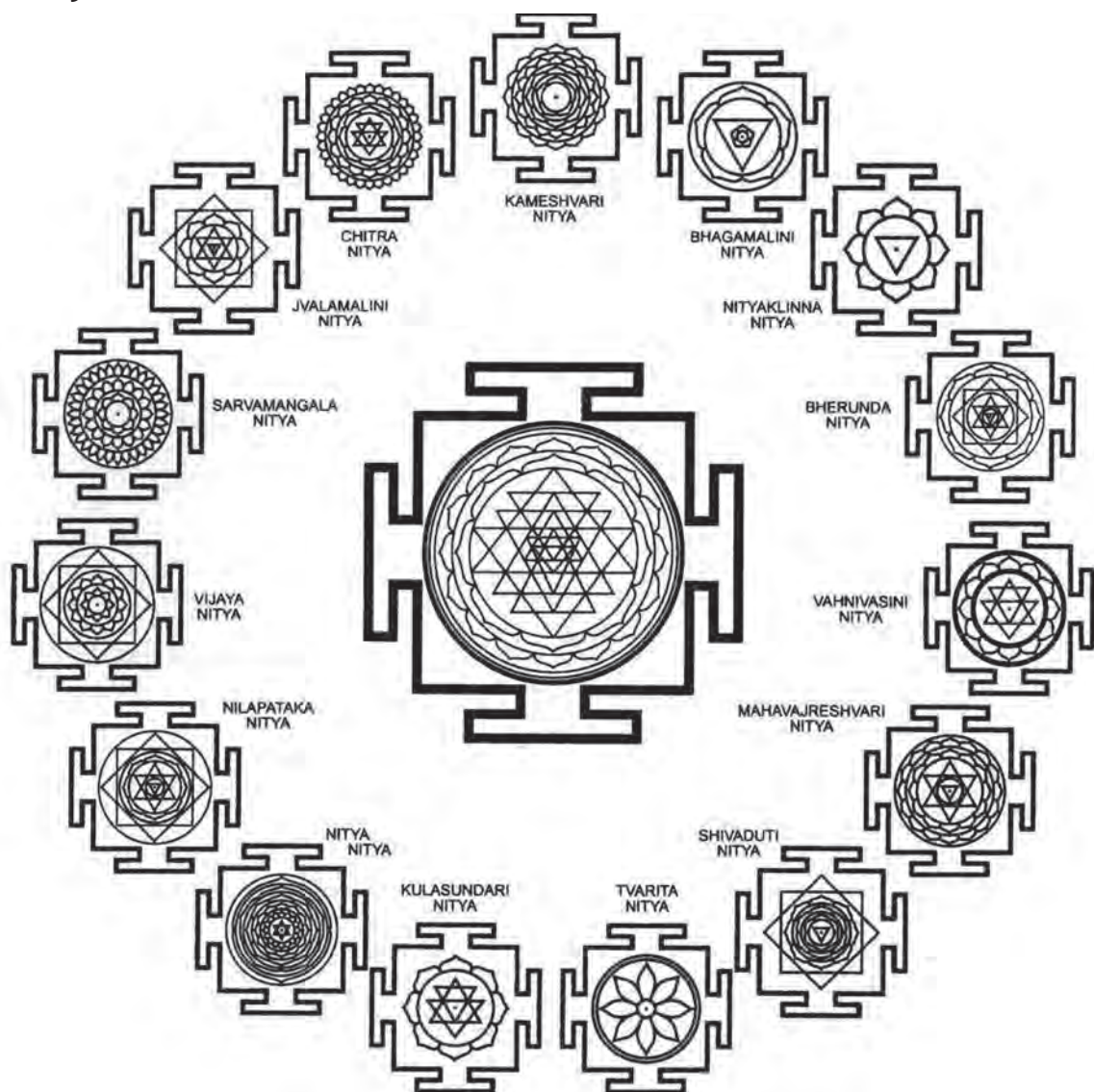
Gandhi was essentially a deeply religious person with an unshakable faith in God, who is Truth. His philosophy, essentially spiritual, should inspire each and every individual to strive for real freedom in his or her moral and social life. In this age of growing violence and greed at all levels Gandhiji is an example and guide to all those who work for a life inspired by higher values. 

Reference

1. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 100 vols (New Delhi: Publications Divisions, Government of India, 1994), 100.335.
2. *Isha Upanishad*, 1.
3. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, 30.538.
4. *Isha Upanishad*, 18.
5. Mahatma Gandhi, *India of My Dreams* (Delhi: Rajpal and Sons, 2009), 14.
6. See *Gandhi on Non-violence*, ed. Thomas Merton (New York, New Directions, 1965), 35.
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8. Mohandas Gandhi, *Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Boston: Dover, 2005), 77.
9. *Isha Upanishad*, 6.

Sri Vidya Mantra: Unravelling the Cosmos

Niraj Kumar



THE VISIBLE WORLD IS only a small part of reality, which again is relative to an observer. Human beings experience only a sliver—20 Hz to 20,000 Hz—of the vast world of sounds. For bats and some other creatures it is

a different sonic universe. Recent explorations in some branches of theoretical physics have led to the formulation of the idea of a multiverse. Moreover, many astrophysicists suggest that only about five per cent of our universe comprises of visible

matter. The rest is composed of dark energy and dark matter, whose properties are elusive.

The human mind is unaware of many things outside and inside the body. However, to an introspective person, the universe appears to be a graded existence from the gross to the subtle. Sri Vidya is a subtle conception of tracing the relationship between various levels of existence. This *vidya*, science, structurally correlates the microcosm and the macrocosm and establishes a connection between the human body, the cosmic body, and the geographical body.

The Science of Vibration

Indian philosophers posited the primacy of *vāk* or *śabda*, sound, in their conception regarding both inner and outer worlds. *Vāk* is the creative force of the universe. As the universe is in constant flux, each movement, big or small, produces sound. This *vāk* evolves in stages in the universe, which is also reflected in the human body. The sages observed internal sounds through deep meditation and discovered the nature and place of their origin. In its principal stage *vāk* is called *parā*, absolute, and rests in the *mūlādhāra*, root receptacle. The second stage is *madhyama*, middle, when it is still nebulous and unperceived. The third is *paśyanti*, perceived, as thought, and finally to the *vaikhari*, audible words we utter and listen. The sadhaka has to follow the audible sound to its root in thought, from there one has to plunge into its nebulous stage and then to the *parā*. One thus travels from the relative and gross to the subtle and to the causal to reach the *nāda*, primordial vibration, which is the path towards the Godhead.

The *nāda* corresponds to the *ākāśa*, space, the primordial element among the five *mahā-bhūtas*, great elements. This is the vibration of 'emptiness'. Any *mātra*, phoneme, gets charged with a *bindu*, point, which the tantras view as the

fusion of Shiva and Shakti—the *spandana*, vibratory, principle. Ordinarily, a *bindu* takes half the time taken for uttering a phoneme. But the *bindu* also tapers into the subtler sound of *nāda*, which is equivalent to 1/16th of a phoneme. The further subtle division of sound ends at the level of *unmanā*, mind in extremely low vibration, which corresponds to 1/512th of the time taken to utter a *mātra*.

Since *sparsa*, touch, always produces sound, the sages developed a paradigm for phonemic emanation. The *bīja*, seed, as vowels, are equated with Shiva, and the *vyañjanas*, consonants, as *yoni*, womb, with Shakti. The vowels are *bījas* since no compound word can be formed without them. The world evolves from a phonemic emanation through a grosser condensation of sound, and created through the three powers of *icchā*, desire, *krīya*, action, and *jñana*, knowledge.

The great Kashmiri philosopher-mystic Abhinavagupta gives a meticulous description of phonemic emanation in his works *Tantrasara* and *Paratrishika-vivarana*. In the infinite *ākāśa* operates the *bimba*, mirror-principle. The first letter that emerges due to the inherent power of *svātantrya*, freedom, from the *prakāśa*—Shiva—is the vowel 'a'. This is the *anuttara*, silent one. When 'a' sees its reflection, it is filled with *ānanda*, joy, and 'ā' emerges. It desires more and then the third vowel 'e/i' emerges. This inheres as the *icchā-śakti*. Similarly, 'u' emerges with the inherent power of *kriyā-śakti*. Now, the first three short vowels—'a', 'e', 'u'—have the Sun principle and their corresponding longer vowels—'ā', 'ee', 'ū'—have the Soma, lunar, principle, as the latter three rest on the former. When *anuttara* and *ānanda* vowels fuse through *saṁghāta*, friction, 'ae', 'ai', 'ao', 'au' emanate. These also correspond to *kriyā-śakti*. When *kriyā-śakti* dissipates, all the vowels enter back into *anuttara* as a *bindu*

and form the vowel ‘*aṅg*’. The *anuttara* dissipates, *visarga*, into the *bindu*, and the vowel ‘*ah*’, ends the cycle. While the *anusvara* ‘*ṁ*’ as the *bindu* represents the unity of Shiva and Shakti, the *visarga*, represented as two dots ‘:’, signifies the division of the ultimate Consciousness into two—Shiva and Shakti. This starts the emanation of the manifest universe in the form of consonants, *vyāñjanas*.

Alphabets Corresponding to Creation

The consonants evolve in a pattern from the *kaṇṭha*, guttural, to *osthya*, labials. These are the five series of five alphabets, each forming a separate group of *spārśa vyañjanas*. These 25 consonants also represent the 25 *tattvās*, realities, of the Samkhya philosophy. The five letters of the *ka-varga* class—*ka*, *kha*, *ga*, *gha*, *ṇa*—represent the five *mahā-bhūtas*: *prthivī*, earth; *āp*, water; *tejas*, fire; *vāyu*, wind; and *ākāśa*, space, respectively. The next series *ca-varga*—*ca*, *cha*, *ja*, *jha*, *ṇa*—stand for the five *tanmātrās*, subtle elements, of *gandha*, smell; *rasa*, taste; *rūpa*, sight; *spārśa*, touch; and *śabda*, sound. The next pentad of *ṭa-varga*—*ṭa*, *ṭha*, *ḍa*, *ḍha*, *ṇa*—corresponds to the five *karmendriyas*, instruments of action—speech, hands, legs, and organs of evacuation and generation. Thence comes the *ta-varga*—*ta*, *tha*, *da*, *dha*, *ṇa*—series corresponding to the five *jñanendriyas*, organs of knowledge—eyes, ears, skin, tongue, and nose. In the last *pa-varga*—*pa*, *pha*, *ba*, *bha*, *ma*—the series stands for Purusha; Prakriti; *buddhi*, intellect; *ahamkāra*, ego; and *manas*, mind. Even within a series, the letters are arranged according to condensation. The fifth element in the series corresponds to the *ākāśa* element and the first one to the *prthivī* element, the second to water, the third to fire, and the fourth to wind. Therefore, all the five series end with nasal sounds—*ṇa*, *ṇa*, *ṇa*, *ṇa*, *ma*—and are termed as *anunāsikas*.

One can find another pattern in how *spārśa* consonants get subtler and subtler as they emanate both laterally and vertically. The last *spārśa* consonant is *ma*, and here ends the manifest universe of touch. By employing Panini’s *pratyāhāra* technique¹, the combination of the first *spārśa* consonant *ka* and the last *ma* forms the word *kama*. The touch produces *ānanda*. The addition of the vowel ‘*ā*’ forms the word *kāma*, meaning thereby the desire for touch in the material universe. It is this word that lies at the heart of the Sri Chakra, or Sri Yantra, which is the diagram representing Shiva and Shakti centred as the primordial desire, the primal seed of mind.

The next series of consonants are *antahstha*, comprising semivowels of the *ya-varga* series—*ya*, *ra*, *la*, *va*. Here the order of materiality is reversed. *La* is the *prthivī* element, and thence come the three alphabets and elements: *va*, *āp*, water; *ra*, *agni*, fire; and *ya*, *vāyu*, wind. The alphabets *ya*, *ra*, *la*, *va* also correspond to *rāga*, attachment; *vidya*, knowledge; *kalā*, division; and *maya* respectively. The last series of fricatives, *ūṣma*, are produced by friction. After the three *śa*, *ṣa*, *sa*, the *ha* is the *visarga*. Here the emanation of consonants ends. *Ha* is akin to the two vowel *visargas* of ‘*ā*’ and ‘*ah*’. These three kinds of *visarga* produce *ānanda*. In *visarga*, the *mātrikā*, syllable, rests, *viśrāma*. *Ha* has space as element, and this conjoins with the *ya-varga* series to complete the pentad of letters.

The three letters *śa*, *ṣa*, *sa* also correspond to *śuddha vidya*, pure knowledge, Ishvara, and Sadashiva in Abhinavagupta’s scheme. Apart from the eight series, there is the ninth series that comprises a single compound letter: *kṣa*. This is formed by the conjunction of two consonants: *ka*, the first one, and *ṣa*, the last one. By employing the *pratyāhāra* technique, *kṣa* is the manifestation of all the consonants from *ka* to *ṣa*, or the world of manifestation. The seed syllables of

the mantras are derived from the proper understanding of the *mātrikā*.

Finally, the sages pinned the source of life to *prāṇa*. Breath is the carrier of *prāṇa*. The sound of breath was observed to open up a simple path to the *parā-vāk*, supreme sound. The sound of inhalation and exhalation, as *sa* and *ha* respectively, unlocked the secret of this phonemic path. Sages eulogized the combination of the two letters along with the nasal *ṇa*, or *ṇga*, last of the *ka-varga*, as the *haṁsa*, the swan of wisdom, and its anadrome *soham*, I am That, postulating the non-duality of jiva and Brahman, the individual and cosmos. The tantras also emphasize the conception of *prāṇa-śakti* circulating through the mechanism of the *sa* and *ha* sounds. *Sa* is the *śṛṣṭi*, creation, *bīja*, and *ha* is the *saṁhāra*, dissolution, *bīja*. *Sa* represents the state of the manifested universe, where balance and harmony is established. This is also known as the *amṛta bīja*, seed of elixir. In *ha* the manifest phonemic universe finally dissolves. This is the ultimate *visarga*. Hence *ha* is the seed of dissolution. If *sa* is jiva, *ha* is Shiva, the ultimate destroyer. The inhalation and exhalation cycle produces the continuous sound of *soham-haṁsa*, That I am-I am That, or jiva is Shiva. The Sri Vidya conceptualized a sequence of the *akṣaras*, alphabets, employing these seed syllables as the powerful Sri Mantra.

Fifteen-lettered Mantra

The *pañcadaśī*, fifteen-lettered, mantra has been revealed by Acharya Shankara in the *Saundarya-lahari*: 'O Mother! The parts that combine to form thy name (Mantra) are three groups of syllables—first, the group *ka, e, ī, and la* indicated by the words Shiva, Shakti, Kama, and Kshiti; second, the group *ha, sa, ka, ha, and la* denoted by Ravi, Sitakirana, Smara, Hamsa, and Shakra; and, third, the group *sa, ka, and la*, denoted by

Para, Mara, and Hari, together with Hrillekha (syllable Hrim) added at the end of each of the three groups of syllables.'²

The mantra has three *kūṭas*, divisions: (i) *ka, e, ī, la*; (ii) *ha, sa, ka, ha, la*; and (iii) *sa, ka, la*. *Hrīm* is added at the end of each *kūṭa*. The first division is the *vāg-bhāva*, the second is the *kāma-rāja*, and the last one is Shakti. These *kūṭas* correspond to the process of dissolution, maintenance, and creation. Since the phoneme *e*, represents the knowledge principle, the *vāg-bhāva* has predominance of the subtle intellect and stands for Maha Sarasvati, great goddess of wisdom. The second division has the first letter *sa*, meaning thereby wealth, and *ka*, for women and other objects of desire, while *ha* means to go or the attainment of these. According to Bhaskara Raya's *Varivasya-rahasya*, the second division has the preponderance of valour, wealth, women, and fame, and hence the *kāma-rāja* also signifies Maha Lakshmi, great goddess of wealth. The third division does not have any vowel or the letter *ha*, Shiva; hence it is known as the *śakti-kūṭa* and signifies Maha Kali. The seed syllable *hrīm*, or *hrillekha*, is attached in all three *kūṭas*. *Hrīm* is derived from the root *hr̥*, which signifies destruction of the entire universe. A subtle *nāda*, sound, emanates when *r* and *ī* are pronounced along with the *bindu* and its *nava-nāda*, nine sounds. *Hrīm* is also known as the *nava-nāda* in the *Lalita Sahasranama*.³

Thus, it is seen how the number nine emerges as the predominant number in the cosmogony and other formulations of the Sri Vidya. Three *kūṭas* also represent the three fires of time, sun, and moon respectively. The first *kūṭa* begins from the *mūlādhāra* and touches the *anāhata*, the second *kūṭa* extends with the brilliance of the sun from the *anāhata* to the *ājña* chakra, and the third *kūṭa* touches the *lalāta-madhya*, middle of the forehead, from the *ājña* chakra. Thus

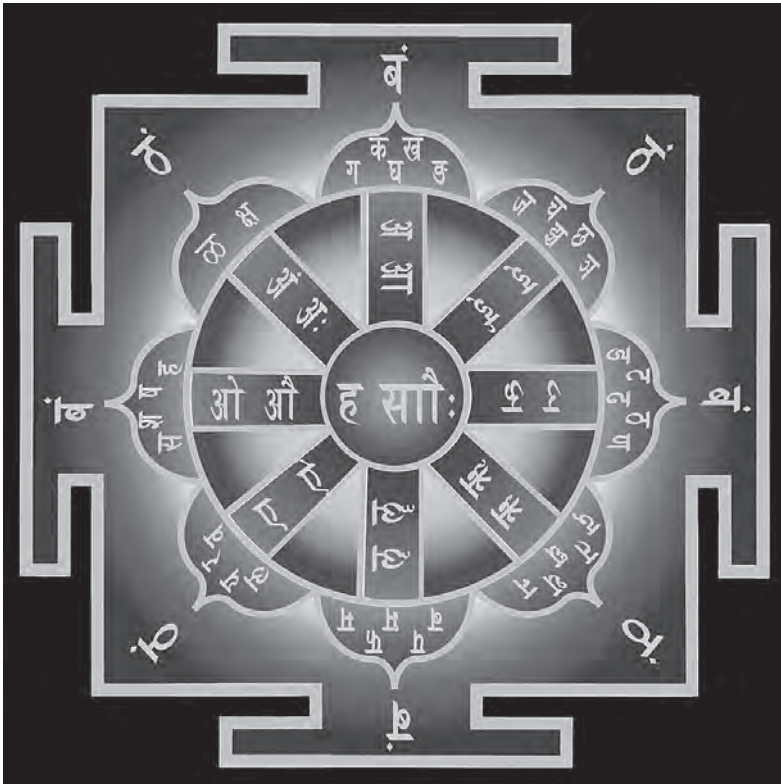
a homologous relationship is drawn between the subtle chakras within the human body and the three divisions of the mantra.

The *Varivasya-rahasya* explains the mantra's first division in the following way:⁴ *Ka* signifies *kameśvara*, one who desires, and here it is Brahman; the second letter *e*, signifies the genital organ as it is triangular in shape; the third letter *ī* is Shiva, who is immanent and all-sustaining. *La* signifies the Earth, and *hṛīm* is maya. In the second division, *ha-sa-ka* means smiling face, since *ka* signifies the face and *ha-sa* is *hāsyā*, laughter. The other half of the second division is *ka-ha-la*. *Ka* is also the sun, *ha* is the moon, and *la* is the eye. One who has the sun and the moon as eyes is the *ka-ha-la*. The second division would mean that Brahman is bliss with its *cid-rūpa*, form of Consciousness (verses 137–9). The third division *sa-ka-la* refers to jiva, as the jiva has three states of consciousness—waking, dream, and deep sleep—and *hṛīm* is the

śakti-bīja. Therefore, the third *kūṭa* will imply that all is Brahman. This is the *mahā-vākyārtha*, meaning of the great saying, as per Bhaskara Raya (verses 143–7).

The same text mentions about sixteen different meanings of Sri Vidya. The meaning of the three *kūṭas* is that Brahman is Shiva and also Shakti, since the concordance exists between Shiva and Shakti (verse 120). There are three pairs of alphabets in the mantra if one counts the *hṛīm* syllable as the mere appendix. While *ka* and *ha* are the Shiva principles, *la* and *sa* are the Shakti principles. The two vowels are Shaktis. *Hyllekha* itself is the Para Brahman, as Shiva in form of *ha* and Shakti in form of *ra* fuse and vibrate unto the *nava-nāda* of *hṛīmkari-śakti*.

Another interpretation of the *pañcadaśī* mantra is to connect the five Shakti triangles downwards, which constitute the Sri Yantra with the form of the five *bhūtas*, elements. These *bhūtas* have a total of fifteen qualities: the earth element



has the five qualities of smell, taste, sight, touch, sound; the water element has the other four except the quality of smell; the fire element has the other three except the quality of smell and taste; the wind element has only touch and sound, and the space element has only sound. These fifteen *kalās*, divisions, transform into time factors known as *tithi*, days, which wax or wane along with the Moon and are in fact digits of the Moon. These fifteen form the fifteen-lettered mantra which is the sound body of Goddess Lalita of the Sri Vidya. But it is the sixteenth digit of the moon that is verily the moon. This *ṣodaśī*, sixteenth, syllable is very secret and not shared beyond the *kula*, lineage.

New Revelations of the Mantra's Import

While contemplating over the mantra for many months I had a sudden flash of revelation. The three divisions have a common pattern. *Hṛīm* is preceded by the *prthivī tattva*, earth element; *la* in phonetic correspondence. Once we separate *la* and *hṛīm* only nine letters are left, three in the first *kūṭa*, four in the second, and two in the third. This is a nine-fold code hidden beneath the fifteen-lettered *pañcadaśī*. We have already seen how *hṛīm* itself is a nine-fold sound, *nava-nāda*. If one infers the meaning from the combination of *la*—*prthivī bīja*—and *hṛīm*—*māya-bīja*—this should give us the following meaning: from the earth *la* to the *ākāśa ha* the *māya-bīja* pervades.

But what is this *māya-bīja*? *Ha* is the ultimate *visarga* of the phonemic emanation. *Ha* is the *ākāśa* principle. When the universe dissolves each grosser element dissolves into its subtler element. All *bhūtas* finally dissolve into *ākāśa*, which is represented by *ha*, the last consonant. *Ra* is the *rāhu* that swallows *ākāśa*. *Hṛ* is the dissolution of the manifest universe, which is nothing but a mere illusion, *mayā*. But the same seed also contains the power of

creation in the form of *ī* topped with *spandana*, vibratory power, of the *bindu*. Thus in each dissolution the seed of creation remains intact and the cyclic movement goes on. *Hṛīm* is the condensed potency of Shakti. Only this can express itself in a new creation.

With this new interpretation we can decipher the elegant wisdom of the *pañcadaśī* mantra of the Sri Vidya. In the first *kūṭa*—*ka, e, ī, la, hṛīm*—the former three phonemes represent the primordial powers of will, knowledge, and action—*icchā-śakti* from *kāmarāja-bīja ka*; *jñāna-śakti* from *bīja e*; and *kriyā-śakti* from *bīja ī*. The meaning of the *kūṭa* will then be as follows: the three powers of will, knowledge, and action pervade everything from the earth to space and also dissolve *mayā*. In the second *kūṭa*—*ha, sa, ka, ha, la, hṛīm*—*ha-sa* is for *hāsyā*, the laughter or joy principle, *ānanda*. This *ānanda* pervades from *ka* to *ha* or across the manifest universe and ends the illusion of *mayā*. In the third *kūṭa*—*sa, ka, la, hṛīm*—*sa* is the *jīva* and *ka* is *Shiva*. The verse will mean thereby that there is absolute non-duality between *jīva* and *Shiva*, microcosm and macrocosm, individual and cosmos, immanence and transcendence. The realization of this non-duality dissolves *mayā*.


Though the sixteenth letter is secret and esoteric, the single phoneme appended with *bindu* and *ī-śakti*, will be the fourth or the *turīya* stage of the *ṣodaśa*, sixteenth, Sri Vidya mantra.

The Nine-fold Pattern in the Human Perspective

There are various other nine-fold characterizations. The three Shaktis, composed of the three *gunas* and with three fires as her three eyes, is of nine aspects, the *graha-rūpa*, form of the nine planets (verse 84). Time is divided into nine parts ranging from *ghatika*, twenty-four minutes, to *abda*, a year. The body is an island

of nine gems, as per the *Bhavana Upanishad*, comprising *tvak*, touch; *roma*, hair; and seven *dhātus*, constituents.⁵ A body has nine orifices. Interestingly, the human foetus grows in the womb for nine months. Probably, the human being that grows under the constraints of non-awareness, with the power of consciousness slowly unfolding, explores the nine-fold patterns in the external and internal worlds. Indian sages have factorized alphabets into nine series, with *kṣa* as the last letter summing up all the fifty alphabets. Corresponding to these fifty-one letters are fifty-one *śakti-pīṭhas*, locations, in the Indian geo-body spread across the sub-continent, which create an idea of a common cultural space. The Sri Yantra, which generates forty-three triangles through three levels of furcation caused by intersection of nine triangles, has been held in awe by the sages and mystics across the religious spectrum of the subcontinent. The Sri Vidya mantra and the Sri Yantra have developed the most elaborate method to connect time and space in a nested hierarchy in an abstract diagram and code sequence. The methodical system reveals to a sadhaka how ultimately the whole universe throbs with the three powers of will, knowledge, and action and craves for more and more *ānanda*, attaining in the process the unity of all things. This scheme highlights the interrelation of each element with every other element and how division and fusion, creation and dissolution, potency and manifestation go together in the cosmos.

The powerful seed syllable *śṛṅg* in the *śodaśākṣarī*, sixteen syllables, is derived from the word *śṛṅg*. This corresponds to the sixteenth digit of the moon also known as the digit of immortality. It is this connection of the number sixteen with the eternal power of renewal that the culture of the sixteen festivals; the sixteen kinds of *śṛṅgāra*, erotic love; the sixteen *kalās*,

arts, of proficiency; and so on became popular in Indian culture. The word *śṛṅga* also denotes two horns as well as a mountain peak. In Buddhist and Vedanta philosophies the concept of the 'hare's horns' is often given as an example of non-existence. The Sri Vidya is the highest peak of sadhana, which also makes us realize the fusion of existence and non-existence, creation and dissolution, symbolized in the seed syllable *hrīm*. In Indian mythology Yama, god of death, is represented with two horns. The Sri Vidya, with its hidden seed-sound *śṛṅg*, is the antidote against the fear of the horned Yama. The mantra is the ultimate code to further decipher the cosmic interrelationship. Sri Ramakrishna himself was a great adept in this science after his initiation by the Bhairavi Brahmani. He went through the entire process very quickly astounding his guru. It was his grounding in this *vidya* that allowed him to experience the bliss of various spiritual paths. After attaining the Advaita experience Sri Ramakrishna boldly declared: 'Jiva is Shiva'. This essential message of Sri Ramakrishna was preached by Swami Vivekananda all over the world. 

Note and References

1. The comprehension of several letters or affixes into one syllable are effected by combining the first letter of a sutra with the final indicatory letter. For instance, *a-ṇa* is the *pratyāhāra* of the sutra *a, e, u, ṇa*.
2. *Saundarya Lahari* of Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, 32; trans. Swami Tapasyananda (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1987), 83.
3. 'Nārāyaṇī nādarūpā nāmarūpa vivarjitā; hrīṅkāri hrīmatī hrīdyā heyopādeyavarjitā'—Acharya Shankara, *Lalita Sahasranama*, 70.
4. See Sri Bhaskara-Raya Makhin, *Varivasya-Rahasya*, with his own commentary 'Prakasha', trans. Pandit S Subrahmanya Sastri (Adyar: Adyar Library, 1948), verses 60–1.
5. *Bhavana Upanishad*, 7.

The Struggle for Bhakti

Ajoy Kumar Bhattacharjee

THE LONGING IN OUR HEARTS that translates as attraction to objects, persons, or places is termed 'love'. It survives so long as it satisfies our mental and physical needs as well as our ego. There are innumerable explanations of love, but whatever way we may explain or understand it, this noble sentiment makes us miserable when it is selfish. Love towards worldly things cannot be termed bhakti, however intense it may be, because it is for transitory objects and under instinctive compulsion. We search for bliss in this world while being unaware that whatever pleasure or joy we get is due to the reflection of the light of divinity. When we become aware, even intellectually, of this divinity, then only we can truly enjoy the world. We slowly proceed by moving from lower relative love to the finer and supreme love for God. Even a little love for God is bhakti, though we still have not completely come out of desires for worldly wealth and happiness. The Bhagavadgita says: 'O Bharata, four classes of people of virtuous deeds worship me; the afflicted, the seeker of knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the person of knowledge.'¹

What Devotion Is

Sri Ramakrishna says:

God reveals Himself to a devotee who feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions: the attraction of worldly possessions for the worldly man, the child's attraction for its mother, and the husband's attraction for the chaste wife. If one feels drawn to Him by the combined force of these three attractions, then through it one can attain Him.

The point is, to love God even as the mother loves her child, the chaste wife her husband, and the worldly man his wealth. Add together these three forces of love, these three powers of attraction, and give it all to God. Then you will certainly see Him.²

The great sage and supreme devotee Narada defines bhakti as 'supreme love for God'³ and 'of the nature of immortality' (3). Now, what are the indications of a person who has attained it? Narada says: 'One becomes perfect, immortal, and satisfied for ever' (4). He also quotes other definitions of bhakti given by sages: 'According to the sage Vyasa, bhakti means attraction to worship and so on (as prescribed by the scriptures)' (16); 'according to Garga (bhakti is) attraction for the stories of God's lila' (17); 'according to Shandilya, bhakti is devotion to God as one's Self, and renouncing everything antithetical to the path of bhakti' (18). Finally, Narada expresses his own view saying that love is 'surrender of all activities to God' and an 'extreme anguish if God is forgotten' (19).

But is such a love possible? This question may arise in our minds, so Narada asserts that indeed 'there are such forms (of bhakti)' (20). He gives the example of the gopis. We also see this bhakti in Sri Ramakrishna's life, who says: 'First, it [divine love] makes one forget the world. So intense is one's love of God that one becomes unconscious of outer things. Chaitanya had this ecstatic love; he "took a wood for the sacred grove of Vrindavan and the ocean for the dark waters of the Jamuna". Second, one has no feeling of "my-ness" toward the body, which is so dear to

man. One wholly gets rid of the feeling that the body is the soul.⁴

In the scriptures it is said that when a starving person obtains food, each morsel gives him strength, happiness, and takes away the pain of hunger. Similarly, when someone starts loving God three things simultaneously happen: one's love for God increases, one becomes more and more convinced of God's existence, and the attachment towards worldly objects starts fading. Generally, people have *ekangi prema*, what Sri Ramakrishna describes as 'one-sided love'. He explains:

There are other kinds of love: *sadharani*, *saman-jasa*, and *samartha*. In the first, which is ordinary love, the lover seeks his own happiness; he doesn't care whether the other person is happy or not. That was Chandravalī's attitude toward Krishna. In the second, which is a compromise, both seek each other's happiness. This is a noble kind of love. But the third is the highest of all. Such a lover says to his beloved, 'Be happy yourself, whatever may happen to me.' Radha had this highest love. She was happy in Krishna's happiness (766).

Bhakti, according to Swami Vivekananda, also is of two types: the *vaidhi*, preparatory, and the *para*, highest. In the first instance there is the tendency to follow *vidhis*, rules, and after a long time the rush of devotion that has slowly gathered strength cannot be contained and comes out into its higher form. This ordinary ego that we have cannot love God, it can love only itself. Moreover, it is very difficult to give up such an ego; it fights and generally wins. Therefore, Sri Ramakrishna teaches: 'I said to Keshab, "You must renounce your ego." Keshab replied, "If I do, how can I keep my organization together?"' "I said to him: 'How slow you are to understand! I am not asking you to renounce the "ripe ego", the ego that makes a man feel he

is a servant of God or His devotee. Give up the "unripe ego", the ego that creates attachment to "woman and gold". The ego that makes a man feel he is God's servant, His child, is the "ripe ego". It doesn't harm one'" (790).

The Need to Struggle

It has been repeatedly taught by Sri Ramakrishna that one must be sincere in one's sadhana. The Gita gives us hope by declaring: 'Even if a person of very bad conduct worships me with one-pointed devotion, he is to be considered verily good; for he has resolved rightly. He soon becomes possessed of a virtuous mind; he attains everlasting peace. Do you proclaim boldly, O son of Kunti, that my devotee does not get ruined.'⁵ Sri Ramakrishna also says that if we take one step towards God, God takes ten steps towards us.

We must be able to frequent good company and avoid evil one, for the latter not only disturbs us but also puts doubts in our minds. Regarding such people Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Well, Keshab, I understand that your Calcutta babus say that God does not exist. Is that true? A Calcutta babu wants to climb the stairs. He takes one step, but before taking the next he cries out: "Oh, my side! My side!" and drops down unconscious. His relatives raise a hue and cry and send for a doctor; but before the doctor arrives the man is very likely dead. And people of such stamina say, "There is no God!"'⁶

An aspiring devotee should also be careful of his food and other habits. There has to be a degree of control over one's body and mind. Simply letting one's instincts and feelings take over is closer to an animal existence. One has to struggle hard for bhakti, it does not come easily. There is joy also in struggling, as Sri Ramakrishna says: 'This is called bhajananda, the bliss of devotees in the worship of God. Worldly people keep themselves engrossed in the joy of sensuous


objects, of “woman and gold”. Through worship devotees receive the grace of God, and then His vision. Then they enjoy Brahmananda, the Bliss of Brahman’ (497). The Gita also assures us thus: ‘O Partha, there is certainly no ruin for him here or hereafter. For, no one engaged in good meets with a deplorable end, my son.’⁷

Sri Ramakrishna further says that as one moves towards the east, the west falls behind. As we start loving God sincerely, detachment follows. Sri Ramakrishna also correctly asks us to divert our worldly tendencies towards God. Narada teaches: ‘The attainment of devotion is through the renunciation of objects of enjoyment and the attraction for them.’⁸ Then, of course, by continuously repeating God’s name and singing his glories one can increase one’s love for God. Narada says that this sadhana or worship should be ‘continuous’ (36). But people burdened with many responsibilities cannot engage in continuous repetition of God’s name. Hence Sri Ramakrishna teaches us that while doing all our duties a part of our mind should remember God. He gives the example of a person with a toothache, who goes about doing all works while a greater part of the mind is on the pain.⁹ Sri Ramakrishna also speaks about two classes of yogis: the hidden and the known. ‘Those who have renounced the world are “known” yogis: all recognize them. But the “hidden” yogis live in the world. They are not known. They are like the maidservant who performs her duties in the house but whose mind is fixed on her children in the country. They are also, as I have told you, like the loose woman who performs her household duties zealously but whose mind constantly dwells on her lover’ (681).

After discussing various spiritual practices the sage Narada declares that to achieve real bhakti one requires the grace of a great soul. Only a burning candle can light another. But

it is difficult to recognize such a one. The only indication is that a great soul has a boundless love for all beings. Narada says that bhakti is attained ‘mainly through the grace of great souls or through a little grace of God.’¹⁰ In today’s world it is difficult to seek for the grace of a great soul. The grace of God, however, is always available. Swami Vivekananda says:

The wind is blowing; those vessels whose sails are unfurled catch it, and go forward on their way, but those which have their sails furled do not catch the wind. Is that the fault of the wind? Is it the fault of the merciful Father, whose wind of mercy is blowing without ceasing, day and night, whose mercy knows no decay, is it His fault that some of us are happy and some unhappy? We make our own destiny. His sun shines for the weak as well as for the strong. His wind blows for saint and sinner alike. He is the Lord of all, the Father of all, merciful, and impartial.¹¹

Every soul feels love, but many a time it is wasted on frivolous things and transitory objects. We need to direct that love towards God, who is of the nature of supreme love. This love will then make us immortal. 

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Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash

Swami Damodarananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

LATER THE NEXT DAY I started eastwards and thus I was once again alone. I was told to go only on the beaten tracks and not to enter any side road. After covering some distance alone I came across a brahmachari, wearing white clothes, belonging to the Sikh religion. He had also come to Tibet on a pilgrimage to Kailash. We started travelling together. There were no horses, no tents, and the land was all barren. Whatever little food we had in the form of cheese, we ate, but did not find any person on the way.

Towards Mount Kailash

Steadily we advanced through the Tibetan plateau till the sunlight disappeared. There was no shelter to spend the night in. We had to spend the night on the road itself. We separately spread out sheets on the ground and on three sides arranged stones about two feet high and covered that with another sheet and weighted it down with some more stones. Somehow we tried to sleep in that makeshift tent, but we could not because of the cold and howling winds. We were lucky that no pack of wolves or wild dogs

attacked us at night. We were told that if such packs attack, they eat humans too.

Getting up early we again started walking eastwards towards our destination: the holy Manasarovar and Kailash.

Once, when I was walking alone, I saw a Tibetan shepherd with about two hundred sheep and goats. I thought of obtaining food from him to eat. I called out from a distance and he heard me. His flock of sheep were all sleeping. I cried out loudly: '*Khi-khi*' (dog-dog) in Tibetan. These dogs accompany shepherds to protect the sheep from packs of wolves. I wanted him to control his big sheepdog. Suddenly the big sheepdog ran towards me. I was helpless as I did not have a stick. The dog attacked me and as I fell, bit me on my thigh and ran away. My clothes were torn and luckily the bite was not deep. The dog must have been old with worn out teeth. Here my first-aid kit and knowledge of medicines helped for treating myself under these adverse circumstances. Though I did not have any untoward incident due to this dog bite, later, when I returned to India, at our Kishanpur



centre I had to take thirteen injections around my stomach to counter the dog's bite.

Undeterred by the bite I continued my journey towards my destination. The Sikh brahmachari who accompanied me in the beginning disappeared somewhere along the way.

As I walked on a sunny day, I quickly became very tired. Feeling very thirsty I stopped at a house and asked for buttermilk. As I waited the owner of the house went inside and brought out a leather bag. It looked like the leather bag that is used for carrying and distributing water in arid places. The man shook the bag before opening it. As he was opening it there was a hissing sound, like one hears when aerated cold drink bottles are opened. He poured the buttermilk into my drinking vessel. I found in it many hairs of yak or goats floating on the surface. I picked and threw them out. As I was about to drink it, a rancid smell was coming out of the buttermilk. Under normal circumstances I would not have consumed such foul-smelling buttermilk. But as I was very tired and thirsty, I forced myself to drink it. I closed my nostrils with my fingers and drank that without demur.

Here I was reminded of a Sanskrit saying attributed to sage Vishvamitra: '*Jivitam maranat shreya, jivana dharmam avapnuyat*'; life is better than death, because life leads to dharma.¹ There was an incident in the sage's life when he was travelling through a drought-ridden countryside. Vishvamitra searched in vain for food but found nothing. Finally, he saw a pariah's house and begged for food. The pariah did not have anything but rotten meat, which was dishonourable to offer to a sage, so he said that there was no food in his house. Vishvamitra then stealthily broke into the pariah's house and found the rotten meat. He ate it to satisfy his hunger and thus live.

Slowly and steadily I was nearing the holy Manasarovar. As evening approached I fortunately

found a tent to spend the night. There were one or two Indians in the tent—perhaps they were pilgrims. They too wanted to bathe in the holy waters and proceed to Kailash.

The following morning, after our ablutions and breakfast, we moved towards the lake. The huge lake was located on the vast Tibetan Plateau with the Himalayan ranges on the southern horizon. We soon arrived at the banks of the Manasarovar. The sun was very bright, which made the weather warm. The water was crystal clear. Not only did I take a holy dip but I swam as well. As I swam, I saw two or three big fish, three or four feet long, circling around me in a very friendly way. Perhaps they were accustomed to do so with other pilgrims as well in this clear warm water. We saw thousands of water-birds of varying colours and sizes flying around and diving into the lake to catch fish! Of course, in winter this huge lake will be frozen, the birds will be gone, and the fish survive beneath a thick layer of ice.

The holy bath and swim in the hot sun made me feel very fresh. I continued walking towards Kailash.

Jyoti-darshan of Kailash

I moved towards my destination under a beautiful golden sun. The sunrays over Mount Kailash had turned the mountain into a huge mass of reddish gold. As the sun rose higher, the colours kept changing: first golden, then bright yellowish, and lastly silvery. The whole scene was enchanting and difficult to describe in words. It is still shining in my mind, whenever I happen to think about that wondrously enchanting divine darshan. Of the whole *yatra*, those few hours of holiness—from about 5 to 10 a.m.—on a clear bright sky, the *jyoti*, light, of reddish, yellowish, and silvery white was the highest fulfilment of my *yatra*. I was still, enraptured. There was no mountain, only the divine *jyoti* mingling with

universal space. '*Antar-jyoti bahir-jyoti pratyag-jyoti paratparah jyotir jyotih svayam jyoti atma-jyoti shivo'smi aham*; light inside, light outside, light at the core within that is higher than the highest, light of all lights and self-effulgent, the light that is the Atman, I am that Shiva.'

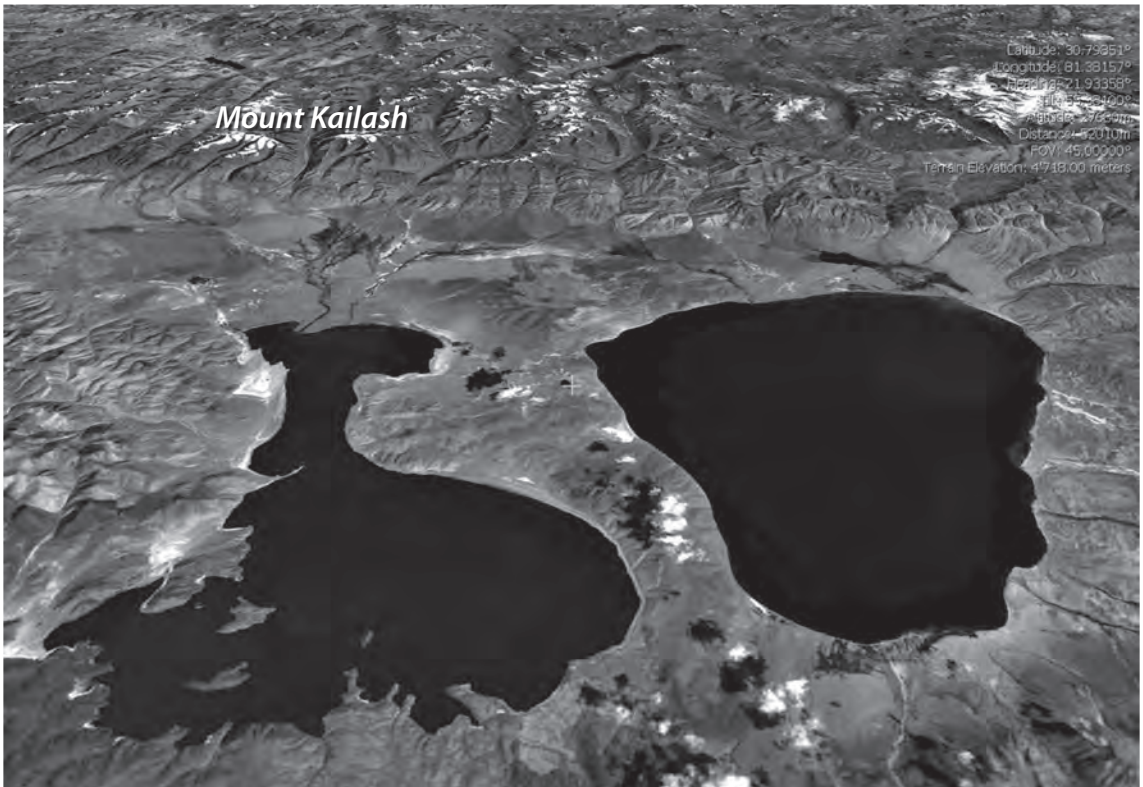
Tibetans are also devoted to Kailash. Intermittently, some of them do *shashtanga*, or *dandavat*, full prostrations, to the mount while circumambulating the holy place.

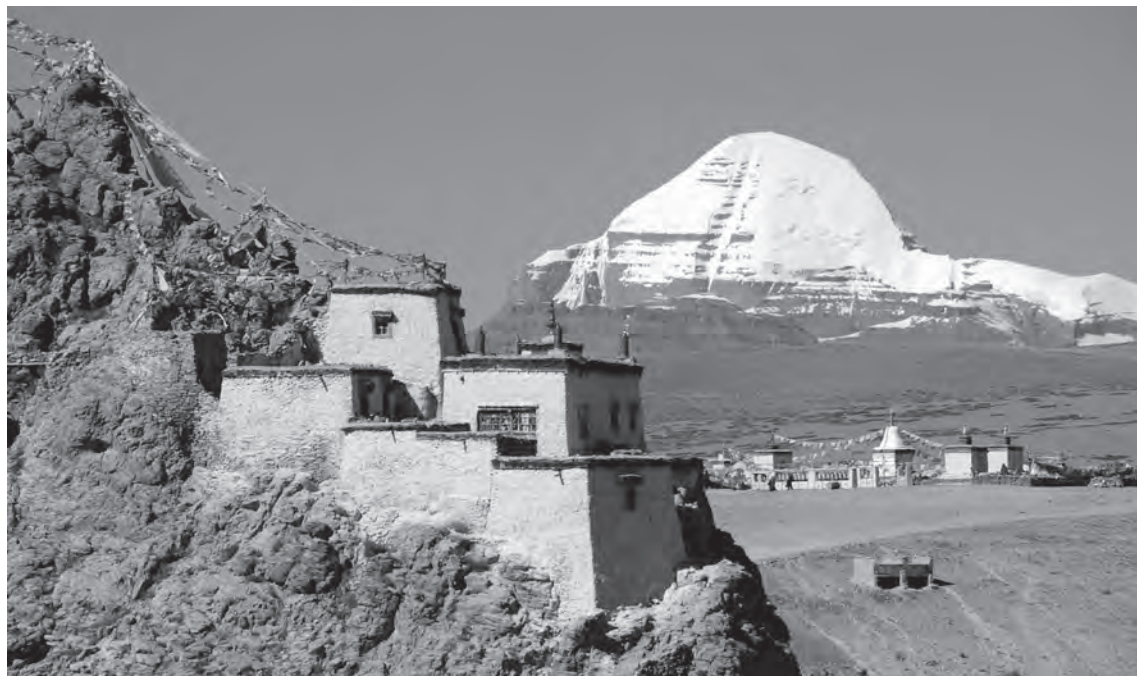
On the first day I ventured out to do *pradakshina*, circumambulation, of Mount Kailash, when a heavy downpour began. Freezing water coming from the northern ice-capped mountains of Tibet covered the *pradakshina* path, and a cold biting wind began to blow. It was around 5 p.m. when dark rain-bearing clouds were hovering above and the water level on the path increased to waist-deep flowing at great speed, making it impossible to proceed further. There was a hailstorm

as well, with big hailstones falling on my umbrella. Due to the cold wind, water, and hail I was nearly frozen. Only my chest felt warm. All the while I was chanting within: 'Om Namah Shivaya Sri Ma Ramakrishnaya Namah.' I thought that if I was going to have my final fall before death, it should be with this holy mantra on my lips.

At this juncture I saw a sadhu laden with some luggage, which he could not manage to hold due to his tottering gait. I saw his belongings being swept away in the current. And a little later I did not see the sadhu either; the forceful current must have carried him away as an offering to Shiva. For centuries many such untoward incidents have taken place, causing death during this arduous pilgrimage. It was the sheer grace of God that I could face all those difficulties and still survive. My feet became unsteady due to the force of the freezing water, strong winds, and weight of my meagre belongings. I was literally

Satellite view of Mount Kailash and Lakes Manasarovar (left) and Rakshastal (right)





Old Chiu Gompa perched on a hill with Mount Kailash behind

tottering and apprehensive of the end of my earthly life, amidst these holy surroundings. I kept chanting the mantra continuously so that if my breath would stop, it would end with God's name. I slowly moved on with great difficulty as I had to find some shelter for the night.

As I proceeded slowly, around 6.30 p.m. there was a severe hailstorm. I thought my umbrella would be torn due to hailstones of the size of *amalakis*, myrobalans, constantly falling from above. Fortunately nothing of that sort happened. After about two hours of rain and hail the downpour slowed and then stopped.

Night in a Buddhist Monastery

Around 7 p.m. I found, luckily, a Buddhist monastery on the way, which I approached with the hope of finding shelter and food for the night. In the dim light of the monastery I found that my lower limbs had become white due to the constant walking in the freezing water for a couple of hours or more. The upper layer of my skin was white and deadened, and by the next day

it peeled off and was replaced by a new layer of skin. I had only a pair of canvas shoes.

The monastery was one big hall without separate rooms. There were small holes in the walls for ventilation. In the centre there was a fire burning continuously. A big kettle was mounted on a tripod stand, in which salted jungle tea was constantly boiling for the inmates as well as the guests. The upper portion of the monastery was filled with black soot due to the constant burning of firewood. Often this black soot would turn into a sticky viscous glob and fall on the blankets and clothes of the guests and resident monks, though the locals did not worry much about this—when one pulled at the glob from the clothes it would stick to one's fingers.

The Lamas were happy to see an Indian monk arriving at that odd hour and made me feel welcome and happy. Their evening prayers were going on with chanting accompanied by the clanging of cymbals. I finished my supper by eating cottage cheese given by them and the *chhatu* powder with salt I had with me.

It was strange to see lads five or ten years old, as well as some older, admitted to the monastery. There were more young children than adults in monastic garbs. On enquiry it was revealed that in Tibetan society there were more males than females. One or two older boys of the family get married and the younger ones go to a monastery. No doubt the low number of females was the reason of polyandry in this society.

I was exhausted from walking the whole day and for those two hours in that cold and rain. After supper I lay down, covered myself with a blanket, and slept like a log. By divine grace I found this only shelter around Kailash. Had it not been for this, I should have been walking around the sacred mountain throughout the night in wet clothes. I cannot imagine the consequences, nor can you.

I got up early in the morning feeling fully refreshed. Had hot salted tea, cottage cheese, and yak butter for breakfast and started walking again under the bright sun around Kailash. By noon on the second day I had covered about three-fourths of the distance of circumambulation. I reached Gauri-Kund to the east of the mountain. I sprinkled a little holy water on my head as the Gauri-Kund was filled from the glacier water, which melted into the *kund*, pond.

The Return Journey


On the way back to India I was led forwards by some Indian tradesmen. The Hoti pass, which is about 19,000 feet, is the shortest and steepest way to cross over to India. One has to be a brave heart to climb up the mountains for several kilometres. The tradesmen had other work to do so they left me at this point, advising me to keep climbing up and not stop even if I felt tired, for I may sleep off forever in that cold.

On top of the mountain I saw huge vultures sitting there and looking at me. It seems that

sometimes travellers, along with their animals, are trapped for hours together by sudden snow-storms. They often freeze and die, and the vultures feed on their carcasses. I saw human hair and skeletons of large and small animals scattered around. By the grace of Sri Guru Maharaj the sky was clear with bright sunlight; I was able to cross over safely. Then I climbed down towards India.

I faced a test here. At some distance a Tibetan armed with a gun was waiting to rob Indian pilgrims of their valuables. Fortunately I did not have anything worthwhile and I was in a monk's garb. He let me pass. Slowly, proceeding with apprehension, I saw his tent house where a woman was serving tea. I drank hot tea and continued my journey. I halted for the nights at *chattis*, located every ten to fifteen kilometres. These *chattis* were lice-infested and my clothes caught the lice too.

Thus, after a week or so, I finally reached Badrinath, where I had a hot bath in the *tapta-kunda*. Due to the cold I had not bathed for several weeks. The lice infestation in my clothes and body was removed by the hot bath. I washed my clothes and blankets too. I stayed at Badrinath for some more time, doing tapasya in a *kutia* till October 1952. Winter was fast approaching, and as proper shelter and food arrangements were not met, I decided to descend from the mountains. I walked down all the way to Rishikesh and then to Haridwar to complete my pilgrimage.

These experiences happened about sixty years ago, yet after all this time they are fresh, vivid, inspiring, and fortifying. This pilgrimage, which I shared with you, drastically changed my inner and outer life for the better. 

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The Many-splendoured Vivekananda's Vedanta

Dr M Sivaramkrishna

(Continued from the previous issue)

ASSESSING THE ROLE of religion in other areas is a risky job. Either religion is totally ignored or it is irrationally used in a fundamentalist way. Both extremes have been tempered by Vivekananda when he asked the question: 'Have you seen God?'⁴⁰—the accent is on *you*. Is it an experience you truly have? The answer Sri Ramakrishna gave dissolved doubts that fall into two categories: Yes, it is an authentic personal experience, *anubhava*, direct, first-hand experience, not mere *bhava*, second-hand experience.

Retaining Religion as the Core of all Agenda

The God question, as they call it now, was raised by Vivekananda himself as early as his student days. But then religion was also a total spectrum of human existence. As J T F Jordens has tersely put it: 'The reform he [Vivekananda] preached passionately was to be evolutionary, inspired by Hindu religious conviction that man is God, reaching out to the root of all evils, the condition of the poor.'⁴¹ This campaign required the correlation of various texts, thematic texts with agenda covering the entire spectrum of human existence, whose 'final end and purpose' is 'to achieve the unitive knowledge of the Godhead' (ibid.). Hence the plurality of areas and themes that constitutes Vivekananda's works.

Vivekananda literature is incredibly inclusive, wide-ranging, almost encyclopaedic. Few areas

escape his attention. And, surprisingly, what Derrida, the high-priest of postmodernist deconstruction, tells us about a text applies, by and large, to Vivekananda's plurality of texts. 'What I call "text"', says Derrida, 'implies all its structures called "real", "economic", "historical", "socio-institutional", in short: all possible referents.'⁴² This does not mean, Derrida cautions, 'that all referents are suspended, denied or enclosed in a book. ... It does mean that every referent and all reality has the structure of a différential trace ... and that one cannot refer to this "real" except in an interpretative experience. The latter neither yields meaning nor assumes it except in a movement of différential referring' (ibid.). Derrida's views are certainly relevant hermeneutic tools to explore Vivekananda's *Complete Works* as a whole. But it is also necessary to look beyond language as a sign to its inner sources and their dynamic processes of manifestation.

So far cognizance has not been taken as one, somewhat, persistent tendency. Scholars admit that Swamiji's advancement of interfaith harmony is unquestionable, though subtly, the scholars argue, he privileges Hinduism. The arguments used to depend heavily on 'construction process', and in this case this process linked to the diehard idea of 'Orient' and 'Orientalism' in the wake of Edward Said. Whatever the efficacy and spread of these hypotheses, it is somewhat sickening to argue that a faith is 'constructed'. Yes, deconstruction itself can construct



'Parivrajaka', by Isha Mahammad

an argument—suppose the argument advanced has no chance of having a counter to such arguments in an atmosphere where there is explicit or implicit hegemony in the diffusion of texts. Some arguments go to the extent of saying that 'it remains an anachronism to project the notion of "Hinduism" as it is commonly understood into precolonial Indian history. Before this unification began under imperial rule and consolidated by the Independence of 1947, it makes no sense to talk of an Indian "nation", nor of a religion called Hinduism that might be taken to represent the belief system of the Hindu people.'⁴³ It is unfair to quote at random. But it is notions such as these that create not only food to interested scholars but also anguish to those who are told they are no nation at all until the British came and that they had no unified Hindu religion. It is as if the people of India never knew how to eat or how to do other related things! Thanks to the monopoly that Western scholars enjoy in the worldwide diffusion of their texts, the voice of those who argue against those pet notions can never be heard.

Anyway, what kind of Renaissance did Vivekananda envisage? Certainly not the one initiated by, they say, Isaac Newton, who banished God from the centre, or Charles Darwin, who dispensed with humans as the evolutionary peak, or Sigmund Freud, whose psyche arrived at the notion of infantile insecurity of the child as responsible for projecting a deity who gives security.

Therefore, should the awakening as initiated by Vivekananda be understood solely in terms of the Western Renaissance paradigm while scholars go on writing about 'the constructions' of Hinduism? The answer is yes, they can. At least they, in this way, are noticing Vivekananda, which was not the case a few decades ago. Whether it is 'constructed' or 'invented', Ramakrishna and Vivekananda have

neither *restored* nor *renewed* but practised the tenets of the faith to show their validity. All the three, the Newtonian, Darwinian, and Freudian hypotheses are, surprisingly, inclusive of the basic sutras of Ramakrishna-Vedanta: (i) The aim of life is God-realization, (ii) mind is all, (iii) work is means not an end, and (iv) as many faiths, so many paths. The implications are beyond the purview of this paper. These four sutras are central to the hermeneutics of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta.

Vivekananda, Women Power, and the Arts

These days we are talking about 'hard power' and 'soft power' as tools to acquire the stature of a superpower. Soft power includes cultural heritage and its aggressive propagation as one of its constituents. One would say that Shakti, the Divine Feminine, has its glorious autonomous manifestation in Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. The most striking manifestation of the power is the establishment of Sri Sarada Math, with the Holy Mother as the eternal source of

strength. Moreover, this institution enjoys absolute autonomy. Swamiji himself declared: 'Our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are as capable of it as any in the world.'⁴⁴ The Sarada Order of nuns has its counterpart in the West too. And let us not forget the fact that it is American women admirers of Swamiji who did tremendous work in India to stabilize the nascent Ramakrishna Order.

For the young there is the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University and other educational centres. Perhaps one may also think of initiating a plan for the establishment of a Ma Sarada university for women; its potential, considering the achievement of the various Sri Sarada Math centres, is bound to be immense.

When a figure like Vivekananda appears, almost all areas of human creativity are invigorated. In this area there is a comprehensive study of the aesthetics of Swamiji by Mohit Chakravarti. This is a meticulously documented and argued study. A comparable study is by Gwilym Beckerlegge, with focus on Swamiji and the celebrated Raja Ravi Varma. This is a very helpful exploration to understand Vivekananda's insights regarding the aesthetics of painting. This area requires further full-length study.

In literature Swamiji's poems have received much academic attention, but the focus seems to be only on the mystical dimension. As poetry it needs much more intensive study. It is again in American fiction that we find the impact of Swamiji. Two instances deserve special mention. J D Salinger, the celebrated author of the novel *Catcher in the Rye*, used to be a frequent visitor to the New York Vedanta Center when Swami Nikhilananda was its head. Salinger felt the irresistible impact of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.⁴⁵

And the reference to Swamiji comes through the fictional character called Seymour Glass, who describes Swamiji as: 'One of the most exciting, original and best-equipped giants of this century. [Seymour later stated:] My personal sympathy for him will never be exhausted as long as I live, mark my words, I would easily give ten years of my life, possibly more, if I could have shaken his hand or at least had a brisk, respectful hello on some busy street in Calcutta or elsewhere.'⁴⁶

Salinger, we learn, was also present at the Birth Centenary Celebrations in the New York Vedanta Center. U Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations at that time, spoke on Swamiji. And Salinger was positioned at the foremost banquet table almost directly in front of the podium. Now there is also the delightful coincidence that Slawenski spoke recently on 29 July 2012 at the 150th birthday celebrations of Swamiji. He told the audience

about Salinger's visit to Thousand Island Park in the early 1950s to attend Swami Nikhilananda's seminar retreats at the Vivekananda Cottage, and the love of the shrine at the Vivekananda Cottage. ... The much beloved writer of *Catcher in the Rye* and other works was able to subtly incorporate many Vedantic ideas into his stories. Mr Slawenski [himself] was greatly moved by his visit to Thousand Island Park and the warm reception he received from the community. Not surprisingly, after hearing his lecture many T I Park neighbours visited Vivekananda Cottage to experience the holy atmosphere.⁴⁷


Finally, I would also like to mention the interesting comparative study of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Swamiji's ideas. This is a doctoral work focusing on the 'quest for spirituality' with reference to the two outstanding celebrities, Herman Melville and Swami Vivekananda, which needs to be extended to further studies of such a comparative nature.⁴⁸

Swamiji's Vedanta Belongs to all Nations

It is time for assertion of Swamiji's global significance without any self-consciousness. It is a new awakening, the understanding of which transcends, but is inclusive of, all those existing tools of renaissance, colonial hangovers, postmodernist deconstructionism, the apologetics of religion for atheists, and so on. These are games we play alongside irrefutable awareness of the eternal divine play of the great Master and his Naren. Language games are fascinating so long as we do not fall into the traps they so enticingly set. They should all be subordinated to intellectual levels, relevant but inadequate.

In his magnificent pictorial biography of Swamiji, Swami Chetanananda says: 'Human consciousness, human nature, and the assertion for freedom are always the same: many great thinkers of the world have dreamt of and taught this essential unity. Vivekananda experienced that ancient Vedantic truth of unity in diversity; as a result his life became the meeting point of the ancient and the modern, the East and the West.'⁴⁹ This is an admitted fact increasingly being extended to global relevance. One such significant point is made by Andrew Nicholson in a very balanced, recent study of Hinduism: 'Contemporary Hinduism also contains universalizing, globalizing tendencies: the global Hinduism of the heirs of Radha krishnan [*sic*] and Vivekananda is one that understands philosophical truths as a legacy that belongs to all nations equally.'⁵⁰ The philosophy of Vivekananda, however, is holistic and not the product of academic engagements.

It is this *holistic* hermeneutics that needs focusing. The contemporary crises—economic, social, and political—are as much a part as the attempts to contain them. Vivekananda's philosophy of practical Vedanta is based on taming

excesses, not terminating totally the *natural* phenomena of an iniquity. Limits to poverty yes, but not total annihilation. It is inconceivable. This is a fact we cannot shy away from. It is in identifying these aspects that we work out a new hermeneutics of Vivekananda-Vedanta. The basic tool seems to be darshan, perception, and not just philosophy as love of wisdom—perception of the world as it is. The various celebrations connected with the 150th birth anniversary of this cyclonic monk could also be a tsunami that engulfs the temporal misperceptions and restores the timeless to the limitless shores of human consciousness aspiring for and realizing potential divinity. 

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'Untitled', by Chandana Bangal

Eternal Words

Swami Adbhutananda

Compiled by Swami Siddhananda; translated by Swami Sarvadevananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

SOME SPECIAL PEOPLE are born with tremendous power; they are capable of leading many people. They are 'born leaders'. Again, there are others who cannot even walk on their own strength and who need help from others. One can see that the leaders have exhibited such levels of effort from their early childhood. This is the rule of nature. From early childhood nature supplies the tendency and power of work to those who are destined to be leaders. This can be understood if we look at the lives of great people.

All sufferings come to an end when one merges in God. All doubts are destroyed. But that is not an easy matter. If by God's grace, one attains samadhi by performing sadhana, only by that samadhi-yoga can one merge in God. Until one can remain united with God in this undifferentiated state, suffering and doubt do not go.

If one meditates in an open space, the mind becomes broad. Narrow-mindedness goes away. A narrow-minded attitude creates obstacles on the spiritual path. Where there is narrowness, God does not manifest. He is open; he is infinite. There is no narrowness in God. The Master's advice was 'renounce the narrow-minded attitude'.

A monk should not even smell a flower. Do you know why this is said? This is said lest some desire for sense enjoyment arise from smelling the flower. Similarly, it is said that a brahmachari should not gaze upon the effulgent charm of the full moon at night. This has its meaning. The reason is that the desire for sense enjoyment arises and makes the mind restless. Some gurus

underwent such extensive hardship. Of course, that is not the opinion of all. If one looks at the beauty of creation, one is reminded of the Creator. Moreover, one thinks how beautiful is God! Intense desire arises in one's heart to see him. The truth of the matter is this: what one feels to be good, one tells everyone else to do the same. This is human nature. Moreover, 'as is one's attitude, so will be one's gain.'

So long one holds a divisive attitude, so long does factionalism remain. It won't go until the attitude creating such divisions is destroyed. The divisive attitude will not go until one attains knowledge. Not ordinary knowledge, but the absolute non-dual knowledge is required. That divisive understanding is the strongest *upadhi*, limiting adjunct. When this limitation is destroyed, a person attains divine Consciousness. When that Consciousness awakens, embodied beings, the universe, and all else appear to be full of Consciousness; all names and forms dissolve in that one Consciousness. Who then remains to fight against the different dogmas and doctrines? One will then see that everything is true. All of this—the embodied beings and whatever else exists in the world—is only the diverse manifestations of that one supreme Brahman. Everything is true. How is it then that people say: 'Brahman alone is real, the world is unreal'? That is for the convenience of spiritual practices. If that concept is not posited, the mind will not give up its attachment to sense objects nor rest in Brahman. Then, is the statement false? No, it is

not. Brahman is more real in comparison to this world and worldliness. This world is surely unreal as compared to the Truth.

When one realizes God there is only divine bliss. What a bliss that is can never be expressed in words! That is the subject of experience. It is an ocean of joy. One who has discovered its whereabouts is also filled with joy. What more shall I say about that! Without sadhana this cannot be comprehended.

If one seeks sense enjoyment and happiness, one cannot attain dharma. Those two things cannot stay together. Mental renunciation and external enjoyment—one may talk of this—but it is very difficult to put it into action. Such a life is very rarely found. If one can succeed in that, let him do so. Why will others object? Likewise, one should not disturb those who cannot accomplish that by putting the ideal before them. Does your nature tally with everyone else's nature? Allow everyone to move according to his or her own nature. Let none create obstacles for others.

How many people will have the good fortune to become intoxicated with God-consciousness? People get intoxicated by smoking hemp and drinking wine. So long as they drink, they get a little joy—just that much. If but once they have the good fortune to get intoxicated with God-consciousness, their intoxication will never leave them and their joy will never end. He who attains such intoxication will have no need of any other kind of intoxication.

God is very near. He is nearer than the near. But such is God's maya that it seems he is far away. As soon as God, by his grace, removes maya, his manifestation will instantly surround you; you will be able to see God inside and outside of you. But it depends on his grace.

Where Rama is there is *aram*, comfort—peace. Where Rama is not, there is no comfort at all. 'Where there is Rama there is no kama,

desire. Where there is kama, there is no Rama. Never are these two conjoined in one place, just as sunlight and darkness cannot remain together.' Kama is a longing. Where there is overpowering desire, there is no peace or tranquillity; Rama also seems to be absent there. If you want Rama, give up kama. As soon as you give up kama, you will attain Rama.

God gave power to both Ravana and Vibhishana. But Ravana directed this power in the wrong direction, which brought about his destruction, whereas Vibhishana directed this power in the right direction, which gave him shelter in God and brought about his salvation.

Miscellaneous

One should do exactly as much as God has given one the power to do; let one not put on a show for others. It is bad to make a show for people. God supplies much more power and capability if one attempts to do his best.

Do devotees and monks grow on trees? They are born among people. Do not lack enthusiasm; be up and doing with your heart and soul.

It is better to have an unmarried life than a worldly life. If at some point of time renunciation comes, the worldly person cannot easily give up attachment for children and others and get out, whereas an unmarried person can.

God becomes favourable to one as soon as one develops the right understanding. If one's understanding is mean, one falls out of God's favour. If one does not obey God's dictates, one will surely face a bad fate.

There is a power by which one can be happy oneself and make others happy. This is divine power. Moreover, that which brings misery to oneself and to others is surely evil power.

Busy with lust and greed day and night how will people understand dharma? Those who live in this world earning money with much labour,

doing charity and the like, offering worship, performing other rituals to God, and discussing topics about God are really praiseworthy. They are the children of God. One who, living a family life, can spend one's days remembering and meditating on God is extremely worthy of praise. However, it becomes very convenient for one who performs all family duties if one thinks that this world belongs to God alone.

He who wants God will also respect great souls like Dattatreya, Buddha, Shankaracharya, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and others because they are people of great wisdom, they attained the vision of God. If one follows them and shows them love and respect, one's jealousy and hatred will go away, sufferings will be removed and one

will be able to realize God. It will surely happen to one who is ready. One who wants God cannot but call upon him. Why will they call upon God if they do not want God?

If you cannot educate yourself closely observing the lives of people of great renunciation, then all of your studies and education are utterly meaningless. It is very bad to live a life that has no goal. It is extremely necessary for a person to have some ideal or other. One cannot prosper without any goal. One should fix a target and then engage in that act with all sincerity. One's greatness is according to the nobility of one's ideal.

People create doctrines and dogmas. God is beyond all such opinions and views.

One needs to be honest by all means. It doesn't matter in the least what spiritual disciplines one observes.

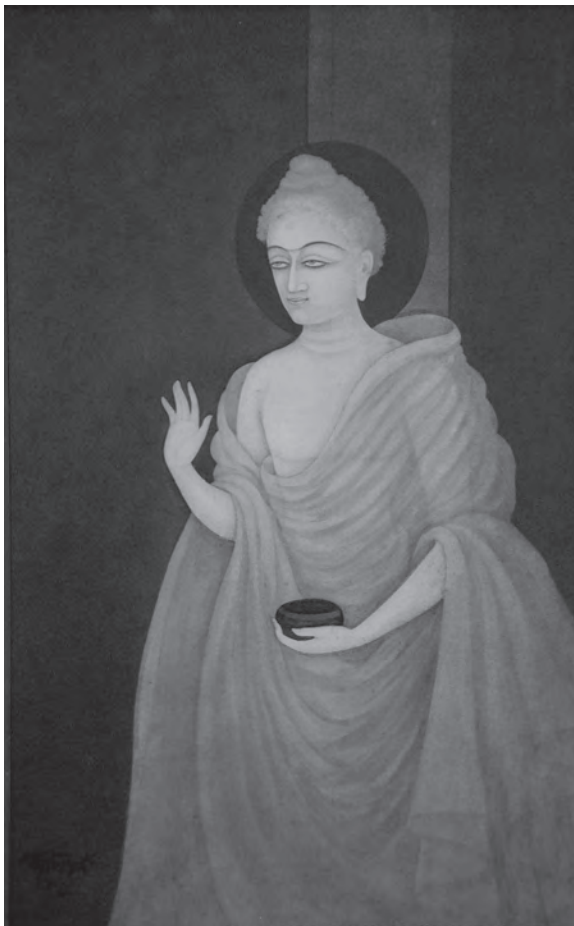
The sentiments of those who follow righteousness and want to see God will be totally different. There is a class of people who will not obey even if you tell them what is right; they will instead follow their own fancy. They will suffer themselves and cause others to suffer as well. Such persons are very tamasic.

It is a great sin to cause suffering to others. As much as you can, by God's grace, try to remove their sufferings and give them peace.

How many people engage themselves in studies with the idea that it will help them realize God? One who does so is indeed fortunate. Others obtain education to achieve wealth and prestige. This is the only motivation. That is why such education is called money-earning education. One cannot realize God by such education.

A woman brought her dead son to Buddha and requested him to bring the child back to life. She had faith that Buddha could do so if he wished. Hearing her words, Buddha said: 'You will have to do one task: bring me some black

'Buddha,' by Kalipada Ghosal



sesame seeds in whose house no one has ever died. If you bring those black sesame seeds, I shall bring your son back to life.' The woman went to many homes, but everyone told her: 'Someone in my family has died.' Having thus gone to many homes, she returned to Buddha and told him: 'I could find not even one home where no one died.' Buddha then made her understand: 'Not only your son has died; this happens in everyone's home!' That woman could then understand and she became a disciple of Buddha. As you understand your own suffering, try to understand the sufferings of others as well. People suffer because they do not understand others' pain. Moreover, becoming aware of the suffering of others, try to remove it. Try to do this in proportion to the power God has given you. Buddha's heart cried for humanity. He renounced everything for that reason. Can you do that? But do as much as you can and let there be no duplicity in that. Serving people in this manner, one will gradually be able to understand who God is.

Perform good deeds in order to bring welfare to oneself. Holy company, seeing the holy images of God—do all these go in vain? To serve patients, to feed and clothe the needy—these are indeed true dharma. Is there any greater dharma than this?

The words of the guru are of primary importance. By doing sadhana in accordance with the instructions of the guru, the truth will be revealed. The Gita contains the words of God; one should study the Gita.

Right understanding is necessary. Devotion and faith in God will surely arise in one who is endowed with right understanding. How very fortunate is the one who is free of doubts! If one calls upon God in right earnestness, the spirit of selflessness will surely come. If one performs honest work, that work will go on and on; but work done by fraudulent means will never survive.

God's grace can be understood where there is guilelessness. On account of one's crooked thinking and lack of simplicity, one will suffer and also cause others to suffer by giving twenty meanings to one simple statement. God loves a guileless person. As a result of japa and meditation people become simple.

How many people are living on alms; does every one of them make progress? The sadhus beg not merely out of a need to fill their stomachs but for the sake of God-realization. There are many great souls among the householders also.

It is a great sin to irritate even one person in this world.

If one must be jealous, it is better to be jealous of God. Why has he blessed such and such a person and not me? This type of jealousy is good.

Who else is a pundit? One who, after completing one's studies, engages in hymns and praises, offers prayers, and tells one's sufferings to God is a true pundit. One who has realized God is a true pundit!

Who is fortunate? That devotee who is trying to understand God.

What does it matter if people say someone is great or small? They are surely great whom God makes great.

Can jealousy exist where there is dharma? Peace reigns there.

You will get peace by conversing with a person who is trying to realize God.

One who takes the vows of sannyasa in right earnest will engender fearlessness in others; one does not want the love of anyone else but God.

Draupadi had resolved to feed people. Sri Krishna said: 'My dear, please feed that person.' Draupadi made great arrangements to do so. Thereafter, as soon as the person sat to eat, the sound of conchs and bells was heard. There was no particular order in the way the person ate. He did not eat one dish after another. Sometimes he was

eating this, sometimes that. Seeing this, Draupadi thought: this person is such that he does not even know how to eat! As soon as she thought that, the sounds of the conch and bell stopped. Then Sri Krishna asked Draupadi: 'Could you tell me what you were thinking? Why have the sounds of the conchs and bells stopped?' Then Draupadi related her thoughts. Sri Krishna said: 'You have committed a great injustice! Was his mind at all on eating? His mind was on me!' Draupadi learned a great lesson: let your ego never come up!

It is essential for brothers to love each other. If people stay together, arguments are inevitable. It is very bad to harbour those resentments in one's mind. The Master used to say: 'The anger of good people is like a mark on water, meaning that it lasts only for a moment.'

Whether you recognize an avatara or not, where will his divine qualities go? He is full of bliss. He is the Master of this universe, Lord of the three worlds. He has taken a human form. Avatars are powerful beings. Being raised in a pastoral family, Sri Krishna showed that there is no harm even if God is born in a high or low family. Oh, do not find any fault in that.

Take caution with these four: a sadhu, a king, a river, and fire. It is impossible to predict their mood from one moment to the next.

One should perform action without expecting any results. Miraculous powers come if one performs action with desire. The Master hated miraculous powers. Such is the evil of miracles that it makes a person impure.

Few women attain to the highest knowledge. We get entangled in maya at the end while going to give instructions to them. Be careful! They will make an exaggerated show of renunciation if they have only one sixteenth of that in their heart. There are many Savitris also. The [righteous] husband is verily a woman's guru. What is the need of going to any other place?

Even God's words may fail, but if one can be like Bhishma, his words cannot fail. Sri Krishna said: 'I will not hold any weapon.' Yet for the sake of Bhishma, he held a weapon, breaking his own promise. Then, why was God bound to Bhishma? This is because Bhishma was not ungrateful. He was ready to give up his life for the one from whom he used to get his meals. One will support the person who feeds him. Bhishma knew what Duryodhana was. Yet, he even fought with the Pandavas taking Duryodhana's side since he ate his food.

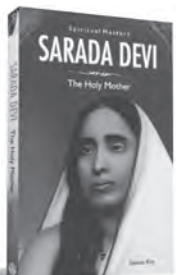
The compassion of Sri Krishna is greater than that of all the other avatars. In the court of Yudhishthira, the [dignitaries of] the three worlds were invited. In that court he forcefully said: 'I am God. Obey me. That will bring good to you all.' At the same time Sri Krishna used to wash the feet of the brahmanas. Again, he would say: 'Obey me. I am God.' Shishupal did not obey. Instantly Sri Krishna destroyed him.

When good things happen, no one says anything; they will press you hard if anything bad happens. This is the nature of people. My dear, it is very difficult to give any suggestions for their welfare! If something good comes, they will be extremely happy and never come to see you again. But if for any reason something bad should happen, they instantly put all the blame on you. That is why one needs to be cautious when speaking to people. One should not suddenly express any opinion. No one wants to accept the blame on one's own shoulders. All problems are solved if one takes responsibility for the blame on one's own shoulders. But in no way will people do that. They are always searching to find a way to place blame on someone else's shoulders. If they cannot lay it on someone else's shoulders, they will put the blame on fate.

(To be continued)

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



**Sri Sarada Devi:
The Holy Mother**
Sumita Roy

Indus Source Books, PO Box: 6194,
Malabar Hill PO, Mumbai 400 006.
Website: www.indussource.com. 2013.
xl + 196 pp. ₹ 225.

Sri Sarada Devi, though appearing simple, has a profundity discernible only to a pure mind. As in the case of all truly great people it was a life lived wholly for others. Once, referring to her own life, she remarked: 'I have created the mould. Whoever so desires may cast their life into it.' What are the different facets of this mould? To whom is the Holy Mother suggesting to mould their lives according to hers? Was it for women of her time who found themselves in more or less the same domestic entanglements like hers? Or is it for everyone—men and women of all times and climes—and in all walks of life? How can we pour ourselves into that mould?

These and many such probing questions are excellently dealt with in this book. Although a biography, the narration does not follow a strict chronological order. After giving a broad outline of the Holy Mother's life, the sublime qualities of her personality, both human and divine, are brought before the reader in thematic chapters with revealing captions.

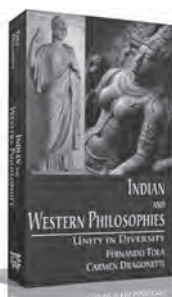
The author's choice of this approach is novel, since the Holy Mother's life can be said to defy the influence of time and the force of external circumstances. From the time she took upon herself the service of her God-intoxicated husband up until her *mahasamadhi*, she led a life of unselfish service, considering herself to be the mother of every being. Perhaps this was the reason for Sister Nivedita to characterize the Holy Mother's life as 'one long stillness of prayer'. Her life was not eventful in the sense we usually understand

that word. But it was full of events, each illuminating a tenderest heart keenly sensitive to the needs and cries of all.

The author rightly points out that the Holy Mother's life can be viewed as an exemplification of spiritual values and also of life skills. Both these dimensions, especially the latter, are illustrated well in the book. The earnestness of the author in gleaning from the Holy Mother's life the necessary correctives for the ills of modern society is evident in almost every page.

The Holy Mother used to cover herself with a veil before appearing in public. The present volume, with its lucid narration, uncovers the veil around the Holy Mother's personality to reveal many glimpses of the grandeur and sublimity of her life. Both the author and the publisher deserve commendation for this outstanding read.

Brahmachari Shantichaitanya
Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math



**Indian and Western
Philosophies:
Unity in Diversity**
Fernando Tola and
Carmen Dragonetti

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 41 UA
Bunglow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi
110 007. Website: www.mlbd.com.
2013. xxxi + 373 pp. ₹ 695.

The German philosopher Hegel had an irrational prejudice that led him to conclude that philosophy was born only in Greece, while India had no philosophy worth the name. The book under review is a scholarly repudiation of Hegel's contention. The learned and amazing authors of the book Fernando Tola, a Peruvian, and Carmen Dragonetti, an Argentinian, deserve to be complimented for producing a book that, abounding in copious quotations from authoritative treatises

of various ancient, medieval, and modern philosophers, both Western and Eastern, disprove Hegel's thesis.

The first chapter, entitled 'Hegel: The Origin of the Myth', deals with Hegel's opinion of Greece, his negative opinion regarding Indian philosophy, his ethnocentric prejudices against India, his inadequate knowledge of Indian thought, and the fallacy of his opinions, particularly with reference to the Yoga system and Buddhism. It also contains critical observations of three modern scholars regarding Hegel's paucity of knowledge about India. The chapter points out the harm done by Hegel to the fraternity of Western philosophers by dismissing India as destitute of any claim to philosophical knowledge. Such a warped opinion forestalled any fruitful dialogue with the philosophy of ancient India that would have added to the rich stock of global philosophical knowledge.

The second chapter, 'The *Vedas*: The Dawn of Indian Philosophy', is the launching-pad of the authors' powerful and calibrated rejoinder to the unfair and uncharitable estimate of Indian philosophy that many academicians in the West have adopted. The section engages in a comparative study of many key concepts in philosophy such as theories of creation; the truth of Oneness; the idea of *ritam*, cosmic order, as truth; and theories of karma in the philosophical literature of Greece and the West on the one hand, and India on the other. The authors give several quotations from the ancient treatises of India, Greece, and other Western countries to show that India is not a whit behind in the richness, plausibility, and profundity of its theories of cosmogony, ontology, and action.

In the third chapter, captioned 'The *Upanishads*: The Blooming of Indian Philosophy', the authors focus on the rich corpus of Shruti to demonstrate the fecundity of Indian philosophy vis-à-vis the Greek and Western one. The concept of Brahman-Atman is elaborately analysed and the progressive evolution of its import over the ages is traced in a scholarly manner. Similar trends of thought in Greek philosophy and the evolution of their Greek terms are shown with a number of citations from Greek treatises. The views of Western philosophers such as Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, and so forth on the concept of soul and Oversoul are

given in the philosophers' own words for the benefit of contrasting them with the views of Indian philosophers. The conceptions of consciousness as developed by Buddhist thinkers like Vasubandhu and Dharmakirti are studied in juxtaposition with those of Fichte and Husserl. The views of the impossibility of 'consciousness', which is not a 'consciousness of', held by Buddhist thinkers and other Western philosophers is dealt with too. The higher altitudes of enquiry and depths of intuition of Advaita philosophy can be appreciated only when we understand the concepts of 'pure awareness' and 'objectless awareness' that connote Brahman/Atman. This single doctrine of Advaita is enough to prove that Indian philosophy not only flourished in the past but was far ahead of the philosophies of Greece and the West in its boldness and originality of quest. In this important chapter the parallels of Indian and Western concepts in many areas are highlighted. The Brahman of Indian philosophy vis-à-vis the *anima mundi*, universal soul, of the West; the personal-impersonal concepts of Brahman vis-à-vis Spinoza's abstract-impersonal notion of God; the triadic conceptions in the Upanishads and in Western speculations; the subject of the correspondences and identifications between the macrocosm and the microcosm as treated in the Upanishads and Western treatises—all these subjects are admirably handled with a wealth of relevant quotations from authoritative sources.

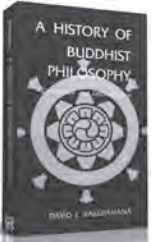
In chapter four, entitled 'The Sāṃkhya System: A Pinnacle of Indian Rationalism', the key concepts and theories of the classical Sāṃkhya system are compared with their counterparts in Western systems: concepts of dualism, for example Purusha and Prakriti; the principle of *ex nihilo*, notions of primordial matter; the concept of the *gunas*, constituent elements, of matter; theories of evolution and involution; proofs of the existence of *pradhana* in Sāṃkhya and of God in the West; the relation between matter and spirit; the topics of jiva and the subtle body; theories of transmigration and liberation; and atheism. The concordance and divergence of ideas in all these areas between Sāṃkhya and Western systems are analysed and presented with scholarly brilliance.

The rich diversity of philosophical reflections, of both India and the West, under the

overarching pattern of unity of themes and subjects has, over the ages, vastly enriched the global treasury of philosophic wisdom. A perusal of the book clearly indicates the magnitude of painstaking intellectual labour and research that has gone into the making of this volume, which is virtually a shock therapy to Western academicians slumbering in their cocoon of self-compliment as well as blissful ignorance of and irrational antipathy to Indian philosophy.

An exhaustive Bibliography of fourteen pages and an Index given at the end add to the value of this unusual comparative study of philosophies, originally written in English, by two South Americans.

N Hariharan
Madurai



A History of Buddhist Philosophy

David J Kalupahana

Motilal Banarsidass Publishers. 2011.
xvi + 304 pp. ₹ 695.

This book is the culmination of thirty years of profound study and research by the well-known author. It is an authoritative and expansive introduction to the various traditional schools of Buddhist philosophy, their historical development and relation to present-day Buddhism. Although the present edition is a reprint of the original work brought out in 1976, Dr Kalupahana has extensively recast and elaborated a major section of it.

The first part of the book deals with various aspects of early Buddhism, starting with a brief glimpse into major philosophical trends during its nascent days and then moving on to a brief life-sketch of Buddha. The following chapters give a detailed study of the various epistemological, behavioural, psychological, and ontological aspects of traditional Buddhist philosophy. The topics discussed are knowledge and understanding, experience and theory, language and communication, human personality, object, the problem of suffering, freedom and happiness. A fresh chapter on popular Buddhist practices and how they reflect Buddha's teachings and philosophy is also included.

In the second part Dr Kalupahana gives a detailed account of his research into the response of some later Buddhist philosophers. These philosophers wanted to uphold the radical non-substantialist position of early Buddhism to the emerging absolutist and substantialist tendencies both inside and outside the Buddhist fold. The author presents a scholarly study of absolutist tendencies present in authoritative ancient and modern Buddhist texts and scholars.

The only shortcoming of the book is its relatively small fonts, making it difficult to read. Otherwise the work offers a perceptive and extensive study to all students of philosophy and religion who want insights into Buddhist philosophical thought.

Swami Purneshananda
Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math



Saṅkhya Saṅketa Koṣhaḥ
(Volume 1)

Eds Dr V Kameswari,
Dr K S Balasubramanian,
and Dr T V Vasudeva

The Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.
Website: www.ksrisanskrit.in. 2011.
xxiv + 264 pp. ₹ 200.

Every language and literature has terms based on numbers or association with numbers, like 'three-cornered' or 'five-star'. Being a very rich language and having an equally rich literature, Sanskrit has innumerable such words. The present book is the first volume of a compilation of such Sanskrit words, which are classified according to numbers—one, two, three, and so forth. The present volume contains words based on numbers zero to five. Relevant texts from which such words have been extracted are also given. When a particular word includes different types of a thing, all the types are enumerated—for instance, under the word *grantha panchakam*, five texts, all the five texts are listed. This is a wonderful work and another addition to the extraordinary productions of the Kuppaswami Sastri Research Institute.

PB

REPORTS

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres held various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Cherrapunji:** A value education programme for parents at Shella sub-centre on 1 March 2014, in which 400 people took part. A regional youth convention at Imphal, Manipur, on 7 March, in which about 700 delegates took part. Sri Vinod Kumar Duggal, governor of Manipur, inaugurated the convention. The concluding programme of the state-level youth conventions of Assam state was held at Gauhati University on 14 and 15 March; it was inaugurated by Sri Janaki Ballabh Patnaik, governor of Assam, and attended by about 1,200 delegates. The concluding programme of the northeast regional youth conventions was held at Gauhati University on 18 and 19 March; it was inaugurated by Dr Mridul Hazarika, vice chancellor of Gauhati University, and attended by about 1,900 delegates. A value education programme for professionals in healthcare and education fields was conducted on 21 March. About 350 delegates attended the programme. **Dehradun** (Kishanpur): A music programme on 22 and 23 March, attended by 400 people on each day. **Dinajpur** (Bangladesh): A peace rally on 5 March, in which nearly 4,000 people joined. An interfaith meet on 5 March, attended by about 800 people. A spiritual retreat on 6 March, in which 350 devotees took part. A seminar on value education for teachers on 7 March, attended by 400 teachers. Special programmes



Events at Cherrapunji

comprising worship, *havan*, and speeches were organized at 13 places in 9 districts from 4 to 20 March; on an average 2,000 devotees attended the programmes in each place. Cultural competitions for students, in which around 200 students participated. **Hyderabad:** Youth conventions in 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh from January to March, in which 10,470 youths took part. **Institute of Culture, Kolkata:** A music conference on 1 and 2 March, in which leading vocalists and instrumentalists from different music traditions of India such as Hindustani, Carnatic, folk, and popular took part; about 1,000 people attended the programme on both the days. A students' convention and cultural competitions on 23 March, in which 1,100 students took part. **Jaipur:** A classical music programme and a mono act performance from 18 to 20 March, attended by about 3,000 people. **Lucknow:** A state-level seminar on 'Religious Harmony' on 8 and 9 March, in which 1,100 delegates participated, and a classical music programme from 6 to 9 March, attended by about 1,000 people. **Muzaffarpur:** An interfaith dialogue on 23 February, in which about 200 delegates participated. A youth convention on 24 February, attended by 550 college students. A music programme on 24 February, attended by about 300 people. **Narendrapur:** 5 tribal conventions were held at 4 districts of West Bengal in November and December 2013. Each convention comprised procession, cultural competitions, seminar, exhibition

on tribal and folk art, and *narayana seva* (feeding poor people); in all, about 5,000 tribal people took part in the conventions. A series of programmes conducted at the ashrama premises from 11 to 16 February 2014. The programmes consisted of a procession in which 3,232 children from 5 districts of West Bengal took part, cultural events including tribal dance, exhibitions, seminars on 'Application of Agro Biotechnology and Preservation and Protection of Tribal and Folk Culture', a quiz competition, a mela and *narayana seva*. about 10,000 people visited the mela each day. **Pune:** A classical music concert on 9 March, attended by about 400 people. **Puri Mission:** A state-level devotees' convention on 8 and 9 March, in which 182 devotees took part. **Rajahmundry:** A music programme on 4 March, in which many musicians of repute gave performances; about 650 people attended the daylong programme. A state-level seminar on 'Religious Harmony' on 5 March, in which around 750 people participated. **Ranchi Morabadi:** The ashrama held the following programmes to mark the conclusion of Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary: Felicitation of a number of organizations and educational institutions on 25 February for their efforts in celebrating Swamiji's 150th birth anniversary; around 1,200 people attended the programme. A children's rally on 25 February, in which 300 children took part. A district-level youth convention on 25 and 26 February, attended by 722 youths. A teachers' conference on 26 February, attended by 48 teachers. Village fairs at three places from 27 February to 1 March; around 1,000 people visited the fair in each place. Cultural programmes from 26 February to 3 March, attended by about 1,000 people each day. A laser show on Swamiji on 4 March, watched by 700 people. **Salem:** The valedictory function of the two-year-long personality development programme for college

students on 1 March, attended by 50 students. The valedictory function of the three-year-long Vivekananda Swasthya Parisheva Prakaalpa on 9 March, attended by 110 students and 5 teachers. **Swamiji's Ancestral House, Kolkata:** Re-enactment of the two lectures delivered by Swamiji in Kolkata, at Shovabazar Rajbari on 28 February 1897 and at Star Theatre on 4 March 1897. The re-enactments were held respectively at Shovabazar Rajbari and the centre's premises on 28 February and 14 March 2014 and were attended by about 1,500 people. On the centre's initiative 5 public meetings were held at different places in and around Kolkata from 23 February to 19 March; in all, about 2,650 people attended the programmes. **Vadodara:** A drama on Swamiji on 5 March, watched by about 1,000 people. **Visakhapatnam:** A youth convention on 28 February, in which 1,200 youth delegates took part. **Vrindaban:** A seminar on 'Enhancement of Values in Medical Profession in the Light of Life and Teachings of Swami Vivekananda' was held for medical personnel on 23 March; nearly 400 delegates comprising doctors, nurses, and paramedical staff participated in the seminar.

News from Branch Centres

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi Morabadi, held a central Kisan Mela (farmers' fair) from 10 to 12 February, visited by about 28,000 farmers and villagers.

Swami Suhitananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the newly constructed extension to the monks' quarters at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati**, on 21 February.

Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated Rasik Sadan (staff quarters) near the water treatment plant at **Belur Math** on 28 March.

Shilpayatana of Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur Math, has been converted from a government-sponsored Industrial Training Centre to a self-financing institution from November 2013. On 23 February 2014 Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the golden jubilee celebration of the institution.

Swami Gautamananda, Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, inaugurated the newly set-up physiotherapy unit at **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Bhopal**, on 15 February.

Swami Suhitananda inaugurated the newly constructed Vivekananda Bhavan, a three-storey building for conducting medical and educational activities, at **Ramakrishna Mission Seva Samiti, Karimganj**, on 20 February.

Several distinguished persons including Dr (Mrs) Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Speaker, Parliament of Bangladesh; Mr Nurul Islam Nahid, Education Minister; Mr Asaduzzaman Noor, Cultural Minister; and Mrs Meher Afroz Chumki, State Minister of Women and Children's Affairs, spoke in the meetings organized by **Ramakrishna Math, Dhaka**, as part of its five-day-long Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration from 3 to 7 March.

In a function held at the **Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata**, on 10 March, Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj presented two awards of the Institute: (i) Vivekananda Award, comprising one lakh rupees and a citation, to Dr Narendra Kohli for his six-volume Hindi novel based on the life and teachings of Swamiji, and (ii) Vivekananda Medal, comprising a gold medal, one lakh rupees, and a citation, to Nishtha, an organization working for women's empowerment in West Bengal.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj consecrated the newly built Sri Ramakrishna

Temple, with a marble image of Sri Ramakrishna, at **Ramakrishna Mission, Jaipur**, on 20 March, the sacred birthday of Swami Yogananda. Swami Smarananandaji, Swami Vagishananda, Swami Gautamananda, and many other distinguished persons addressed the public meetings. A procession and many cultural programmes formed part of the three-day function held from 18 to 20 March. In all, 240 monastics and about 3,000 devotees attended the celebration.

Relief

Economic Rehabilitation • Limbdi centre handed over 46 cows to needy people and **Porbandar** centre gave 11 sewing machines among economically backward women on 18 March.

Fire Relief • In order to help 76 families whose shops had been gutted by a fire **Dinajpur** (Bangladesh) centre distributed from 20 January to 13 February a wide range of merchandise to them to restart their businesses.

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Darjeeling**: 71 pairs of shoes, 71 pairs of socks, and 47 bags from 22 January to 23 March; **Jalpaiguri**: 350 saris on 23 February and 23 March; **Kothar**: 300 saris, 148 adults' garments, 344 children's garments, and 12 bed sheets on 1 and 5 December.

Drought Relief • **Dinajpur** centre set up a tube-well in Amoir village of Dinajpur district.

Winter Relief • The following centres distributed blankets to needy people. **Aalo**: 650, 24 Dec to 23 Mar; **Agartala**: 400, 30 Nov to 28 Jan; **Asansol**: 925, 16 Nov to 13 Feb; **Baranagar Mission**: 150, 4 Nov to 19 Feb; **Belgharia**: 117, Feb and Mar; **Bhubaneshwar**: 400, 23 Dec to 17 Jan; **Chapra**: 835, 3 Feb to 14 Mar; **Contai**: 450, 18 Nov; **Darjeeling**: 222, 22 Jan to 30 Mar; **Delhi**: 700, 9 Dec to 4 Mar; **Dinajpur** (Bangladesh): 213, 7 Mar; **Gol Park**: 570, 1 Nov to 30 Jan; **Hatamuniguda**: 150, 10 Feb; **Jamshedpur**: 300, 16 Nov to 20 Feb; **Kamarpukur**: 500, 24 to 31 Jan; **Kothar**: 300, 1 and 5 Dec; **Narottam Nagar**: 290, Mar. Moreover, **Darjeeling** centre distributed 71 jackets and 71 pairs of gloves among needy people from 22 January to 23 March.

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'FUTTEH BILLASS', the residential palace of the erstwhile Raja of Khetri, is sanctified with the stay of Swami Vivekananda himself. Swamiji had spent considerable time within these grand old walls during his three visits to

the kingdom of Khetri. It was from here, buoyed by the encouragement of his beloved disciple Raja Ajit Singh Bahadur, that he truly launched forth his missionary life.

The palace building was handed over to the Ramakrishna Mission by the last Raja of Khetri State in 1959. Since then the Ramakrishna Mission, Khetri has taken up the ardent task of preserving the memory of the great Swami by involving itself in various spiritual, cultural, as well as service activities in and around Khetri.

However, the condition of this historic building is deteriorating with age. 150 long years of wind, rain and heat are slowly taking its toll of the grand structure. The time has come when serious attention must be given to restoring the former glory to this 'Temple to the memory of Swami Vivekananda'.

As a tribute to Swamiji on the occasion of his 150th Birth Anniversary, we have

decided to take up the renovation process of this historic edifice, which holds witness to a unique monk-king relationship. We have also decided to set up an attractive Museum, elucidating this almost-forgotten chapter in history.



We feel happy to inform you that the restoration work of the historic 'Futteh Billass' palace has been started by us from the 10th of July, 2011. The total expenditure towards this ambitious project comes to the tune of Rupees Six Crores, of which we are receiving Rupees Four

Crores as grant from the Central and State Governments.

For the balance amount of Rupees Two Crores, we solely depend on the beneficence of all you devotees and admirers of Swami Vivekananda. Brothers and Sisters, we feel that a contribution from you towards this noble project will be an outstanding tribute to this great Saint-Patriot-Philosopher on his 150th Birth Anniversary. All donations are exempt from Income Tax, under section 80G of the IT Act, 1961.

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